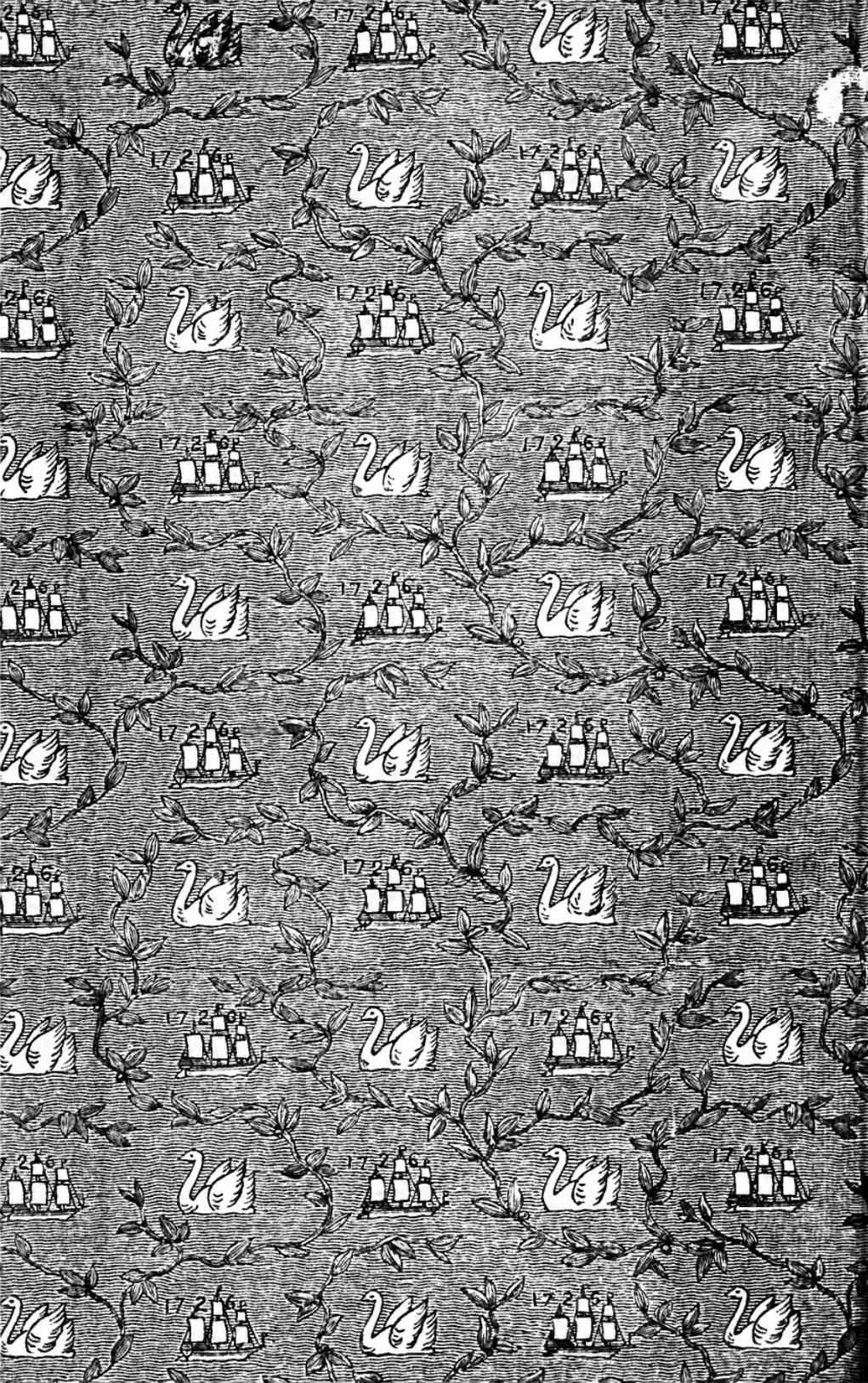
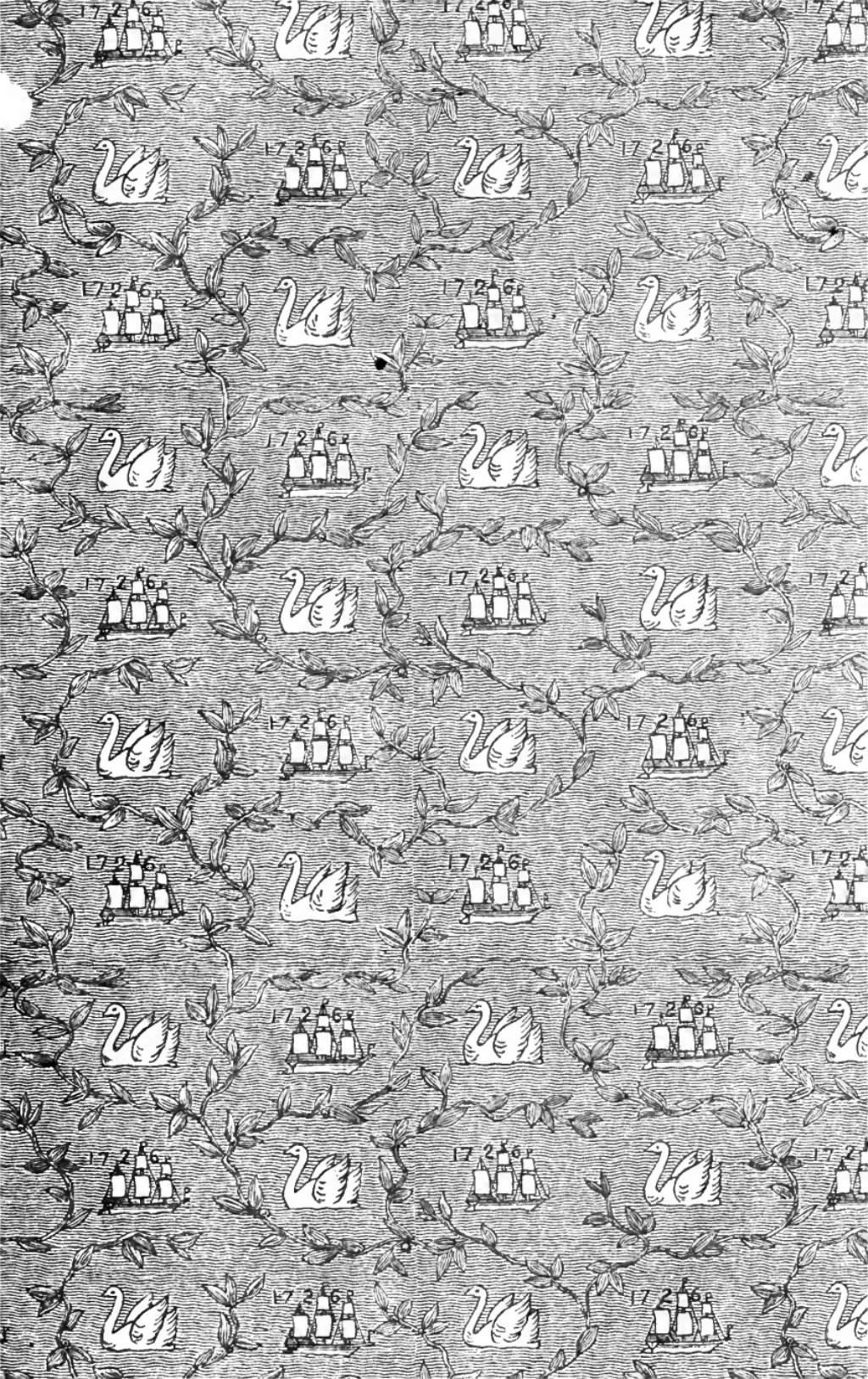




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Stafford Jones Still
from Gracemill Still

Xmas 1898

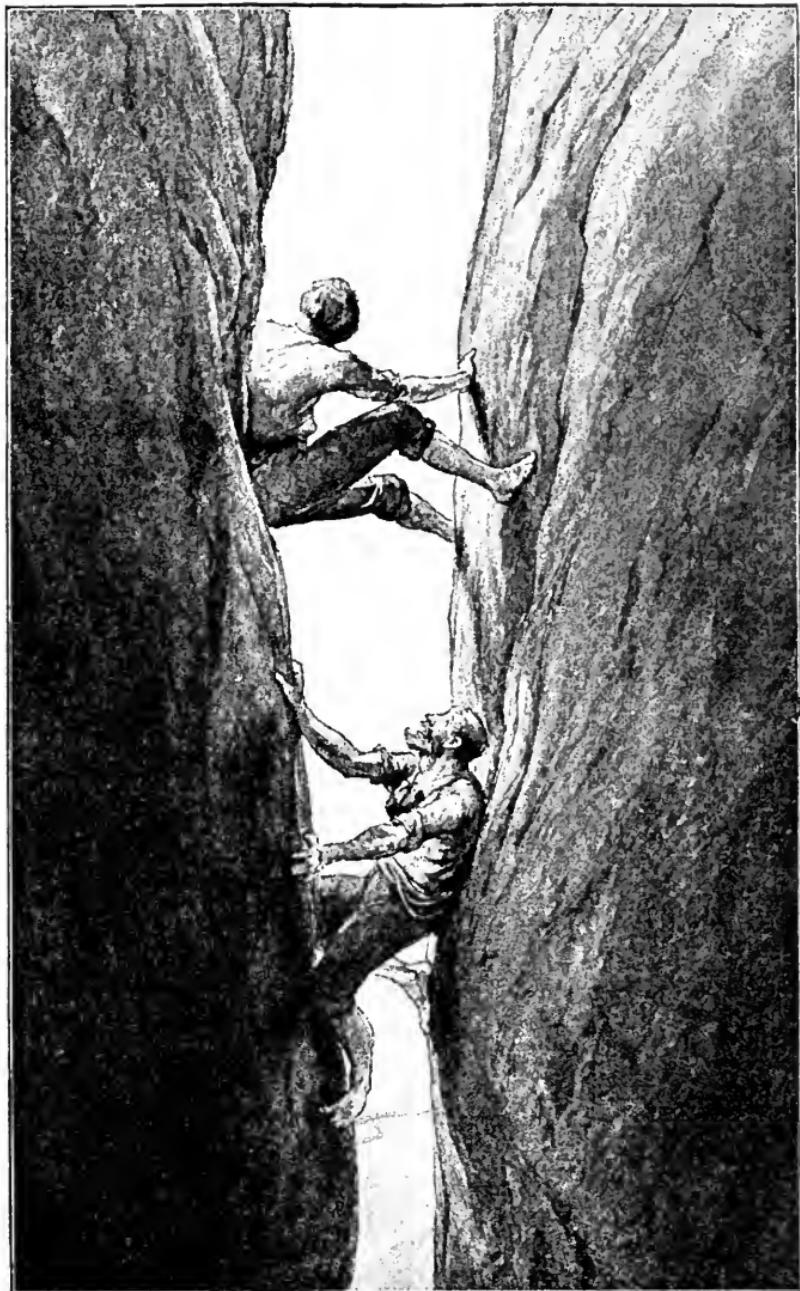


S N A P

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IN THE CHIMNEY

See page 243

SNAP

A LEGEND OF THE LONE MOUNTAIN

BY

C. PHILLIPPS-WOLLEY

AUTHOR OF 'SPORT IN THE CRIMEA AND CAUCASUS' ETC.



WITH THIRTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS BY H. G. WILLINK

NEW EDITION

LONDON

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
AND NEW YORK : 15 EAST 16th STREET

1895

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1895

TO SMALL CLIVE.

*I suppose that you'll cost me the deuce of a lot,
I suppose I must pay and look pleasant,
Though you're only a small insignificant dot—
My three-year-old warrior—at present.*

*But if ever you need the paternal 'tip,'
If ever you sin and must suffer,
Be brave and go straight, or I'll 'give you gyp'—
If I don't you may call me 'a duffer.'*



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S N A P

CHAPTER I

FERNHALL v. LOAMSHIRE

‘WHAT on earth shall we do, Winthrop?’ asked one of the Fernhall Eleven of a big fair-faced lad, who seemed to be its captain.

‘Do! I’ll be shot if I know, Wyndham,’ he replied. ‘It is bad enough to be a bat short, but really I don’t know that we *can* spare a bowler.’

‘Ah, well,’ suggested another of the group, ‘though Hales did very well for the Twenty-two, it isn’t quite the same thing bowling against such a team as Loamshire brings down; he might not “come off” after all, don’t you know?’

A quiet grin spread over the captain’s face. No one knew better than he did the spirit which prompted Poynter’s last remark.

Good bowler though he was, Poynter had often been a sad thorn in Winthrop’s side. If you put him on first with the wind in his favour, Poynter would be beautifully good-tempered, and bowl sometimes like a very Spofforth. Only then sometimes he wouldn’t!

Sometimes an irreverent batsman from Loamshire who had never heard of Poynter's break from the leg would hit him incontinently for six, and perhaps do it twice in one over. Then Poynter got angry. His arms began to work like a windmill. He tried to bowl rather faster than Spofforth ever did; about three times as fast as Nature ever meant John Poynter to. The result of this was always the same. First he pitched them short, and the delighted batsman cut them for three; then he pitched them up, and that malicious person felt a thrill of pleasure go through his whole body as he either drove them or got them away to square leg. Then Winthrop had to take him off. This was when the trouble began. Suddenly Poynter would take his place in the field—and it was not every place in the field which suited him. If you put him in the deep field, he growled at the folly which risked straining a bowler's arm by shying. If you put him close in, he grumbled at the risk he ran of having those dexterous fingers of his damaged by a sharp cut or a 'sweet' drive. For of course he always expected to be put on again, and from the time that he reached his place until the time that he was again put into possession of the ball he did nothing but watch his rival with malicious envy, making a mental bowling analysis for him, in which he took far more note of the hits (or wides if there were any) than he did of the maiden overs which were bowled.

But Frank Winthrop was a diplomatist, as a cricket captain should be, so, though he grinned, he only replied, 'That's true enough, Poynter, but I must

have some ordinary straight stuff, such as Hales's, to rest you and Rolles, and put these fellows off their guard against your curly ones.'

'Yes, I suppose it is a mistake to bowl a fellow good balls all the time. It makes him play too carefully,' replied the self-satisfied Poynter.

'Well, but, Winthrop,' insisted the first speaker, 'if you don't do without a change bowler, what will you do? That other fellow in the Twenty-two doesn't bowl well enough, but there are lots of them useful bats.'

'I know all that, but I've made up my mind,' replied the young autocrat. 'I shall play a man short, if I can't persuade Trout' (an irreverent sobriquet for their head-master) 'to let Snap Hales off in time.'

When a captain of a school eleven says that he has made up his mind, the intervention of anyone less than a head-master is useless, so that no one protested.

As the group broke up Wyndham put his arm through Winthrop's, and together they strolled towards the door of the school-house.

'Are you going up to see "the head," Major?' he asked.

'Yes,' replied Winthrop.

'What! about Snap Hales?' demanded Wyndham.

'Yes,' again replied Winthrop, 'about that young fool Snap.'

'What has he been up to now?' demanded his chum.

'Oh, he has been cheeking Cube-root again. It

seems old Cube-root couldn't knock mathematics into him anyhow, so he piled on the impositions. Snap did as many lines as he could, but even with three nibs in your pen at once there is a limit to the number which a fellow can do in a day, and Master Snap has so many of these little literary engagements for other masters as well as old Cube that at last he reached a point beyond which no possible diligence would carry him.'

'Poor old Snap!' laughed Wyndham.

'Then, as he had just got into the eleven,' continued Winthrop, 'he didn't like to give up his half-hour with the professional; the result of all which was that yesterday old Cube asked him for his lines and was told—

"I haven't done them, sir."

"Haven't done them, sir: what do you mean?" thundered Cube.

"I hadn't time, sir," pleaded Snap.

"Not time! Why, I myself saw you playing cricket to-day for a good half-hour. What do you mean by telling me you had not time?" asked Cube.

"I had not time, sir, because—" Snap tried to say, but Cube stopped him with that abominable trick of his, you know it.

"Yēēs, Hales, yēēs! Yēēs, Hales, yēēs! So you had no time, Hales! Yēēs, Hales, yēēs!"

"No, sir, I was obliged to—"

"To tell me a lie, sir! Yēēs, Hales, yēēs."

Here Snap's beastly temper gave out, and instead of waiting till he got a chance of telling his story properly to old Cube, who, although he loves mathe-

matics and hates a lie, is a good chap after all, he deliberately mimicked the old chap with—

“ ‘Nōō, sir, nōō! Nōō, sir, nōō!’ ”

‘ Of course the other fellows went into fits of laughter, and old Cube had fits too, only of another kind, and I expect I shall get “fits” from the Head for trying to get the young idiot off for this match. But I really don’t see how we can get on without him,’ Winthrop added, as he left his friend at the door, and plodded with a heavy heart up to the head-master’s sanctum.

What happened there the narrator of this truthful story does not pretend to know. The inside of a head-master’s library was to him a place too sacred for intrusion, and it was only through the foolish persistence of certain unwise under-masters that he was ever induced to enter it. Whenever he did, he left it with a note of recommendation from that excellent man to the school-sergeant. It was not quite a testimonial to character, but still something like it, and always contained an allusion to one of the most graceful of forest trees, the mournful, beautiful birch. I am told that this is the favourite tree of the Russian peasant. I dare say. I am told he is still uneducated. It was education which, I think, taught me to dislike the birch.

But I am wandering. The only words which reached me as I stood below, wondering if my leave out of bounds would be granted or not—and I had very good reasons for betting on the ‘not’—were these :

‘ Very well, if he is no good as a bat it won’t

much matter. I'll do what I can for you, only win the toss and go in first.'

He was a good fellow, our Head, and from Winthrop's face as he came downstairs I expect that he thought so.

I was quite right about that leave out of bounds. The head-master felt, no doubt quite properly, that on such a day as the day of the Loamshire match, when there were sure to be lots of visitors about, it would not do for one of the school's chief ornaments to be absent. It was very hard upon me because, you see, I could only buy twelve tarts for my shilling at the tuckshop, whereas if I had got leave out of bounds I could have got thirteen for the same money, only four miles from school! That sense of duty to the public which no doubt will lead me some day to take a seat in the House of Commons enabled me to bear up under my trouble, and about two o'clock I was watching the match with my fellows on the Fernhall playing fields.

Ah, me! those Fernhall playing fields! with their long level stretches of green velvet, their June sunshine and wonderful blue skies! What has life like them nowadays? On this day they were looking their very best, and, though I have wandered many a thousand miles since then, I have never seen a fairer sight. Forty acres there were, all in a ring fence, of level greensward, every yard of it good enough for a match wicket, and the ring-fence itself nothing but a tall rampart of green turf, twelve or fourteen feet high, and broad enough at the top for two boys to walk upon it abreast.

Out in the middle of this great meadow the wickets were pitched, and I really believe that I have since played billiards on a surface less level than the two-and-twenty yards which they enclosed. The lines of the crease gleamed brightly against the surrounding green, and the strong sun blazed down upon the long white coats of the umpires, the Fernhall eleven (or rather ten, for Snap was still absent), and two of the strongest bats in Loamshire.

But, though fourteen figures had the centre of the ground to themselves, there was plenty of vigorous young life round its edges. There, where the sun was the warmest, with their backs up against the bank which enclosed the master's garden, sat or lay some four hundred happy youngsters, anxiously watching every turn of the match, keen critics, although thoroughgoing partisans. Like young lizards, warmed through with the sun, lying soft against the mossy bank, the scent of the flowers came to them over the garden hedge, and the soft salt breeze came up from the neighbouring sea. You could hear the lip and roll of its waves quite plainly where you lay, if you listened for it, for after all it was only just beyond that green bulwark of turf behind the pavilion. Many and many a time have we boys seen the white foam flying in winter across those very playing-fields, and gathered sea-wrack from the hedges three miles inland. By-and-by, when the match was over, most of the two-and-twenty players in it would race down to the golden sands and roll like young dolphins in the blue waves, for Fernhall boys swam like fishes in those good old days,

and such a sea in such sunshine would have tempted the veriest coward to a plunge.

But the match was not over yet, although yellow-headed Frank Winthrop began to think that it might almost as well be. He was beginning to despair. It was a one-day match : the school had only made 156, while the county had only two wickets down for 93 ; of course there was no chance of a second innings ; the two best bats in Loamshire seemed set for a century apiece ; Poynter had lost his temper and seemed trying rather to hurt his men than to bowl them, and everyone else had been tried and had failed. What on earth was an unfortunate captain to do ? Just then a figure in a long cassock and college cap, a fine portly figure with a kindly face, turned round, and, using the back of a trembling small boy for a desk, wrote a note and despatched the aforesaid small boy with it to the rooms of the Rev. Erasmus Cube-Root. A minute or two before, Winthrop had found time to exchange half-a-dozen words with 'the Head' whilst in the long field, and now he turned and raised his cap to him, while an expression of thankfulness overspread his features. The two Loamshire men at the wickets were Grey and Hawker, both names well known on all the cricket-fields of England, and one of them known and a little feared by our cousins at the Antipodes. This man, Hawker, had been heard to say that he was coming to Fernhall to get up his average and have an afternoon's exercise. It looked very much as if he would justify his boast. He was an aggravating bat to bowl to, for more reasons than one. One of

his tricks, indeed, seemed to have been invented for the express purpose of chaffing the bowler.

As he stood at the wicket his bat was almost concealed from sight behind his pads, his wicket appeared to be undefended, and all three stumps plainly visible to his opponent. Alas! as the ball came skimming down the pitch the square-built little athlete straightened himself, the bat came out from its ambush, and you had the pleasure of knowing that another six spoiled the look of your analysis. If he was in very high spirits, and you in very poor form, he would indulge in the most bewildering liberties, spinning round on his heels in a way known to few but himself, so as to hit a leg ball into the ‘drives.’ Altogether he was, as the boys knew, a perfect Tartar to deal with if he once got ‘set.’

Grey, the other bat, was quite as exasperating in his way as Hawker, only it was quite another way. He it was who had broken poor Poynter’s heart. You did not catch *him* playing tricks. You did not catch *him* hitting sixes, or even threes; but neither did you catch him giving the field a chance, launching out at a yorker, or interfering with a ‘bumpy’ one. Oh, no! It didn’t matter what you bowled him, it was always the same story. ‘Up went his shutter,’ as Poynter feelingly remarked, ‘and you had to pick up that blessed leather and begin again.’ Sometimes he placed a ball so as to get one run for it, sometimes he turned round and sped a parting ball to leg, and sometimes he snicked one for two. He was a slow scorer, but he seemed to possess the freehold of the ground he stood upon. No one could give *him* notice to quit.

Such were the men at the wicket, and such the state of the game, when a tall, slight figure came racing on to the ground in very new colours, and with fingers which, on close inspection, would have betrayed a more intimate acquaintance with the ink-pot than with the cricket-ball. Although it would have been nearer to have passed right under the head-master's nose, the new-comer went a long way round, eyeing that dignitary with nervous suspicion, and raising his cap with great deference when the eye of authority rested upon him. As soon as he came on to the ground he dropped naturally into his place, and anyone could have seen at a glance that, whatever his other merits might or might not be, Snap Hales was a real keen cricketer. When a ball came his way there was no waiting for it to reach him on his part. He had watched it, as a hawk does a young partridge, from the moment it left the bowler's hands, and was halfway to meet it already. Like a flash he had it with either hand—both were alike to him—and in the same second it was sent back straight and true, a nice long hop, arriving in the wicket-keeper's hands at just about the level of the bails.

But Winthrop had other work for Snap to do, and at the end of the over sent him to replace Rolles at short-slip.

'By George, Towzer, they are going to put on Snap Hales,' said one youngster to another on the rugs under the garden hedge.

'About time, too,' replied his companion; 'if he can't bowl better than those two fellows he ought to be kicked.'

'Well, I dare say both you and he will be, if he doesn't come off to-day. I expect it was your brother who got him off his lines to-day, and he won't be a pleasant companion for either of you if the school gets beaten with half-a-dozen wickets to spare.'

Towzer, the boy addressed, was brother to the captain of the eleven, and his fag. Snap Hales, when at home, lived near the Winthrops, so that in the school, generally, they were looked upon as being of one clan, of which, of course, Frank Winthrop was the chief. Willy Winthrop was Towzer's proper name, or at least the name he was christened by; but any-one looking at the fair-haired jolly-looking little fellow would have doubted whether his godfathers were wiser than his schoolfellows. No one would ever have dreamed of him as a future scholar of Balliol, nor, on the other hand, as a sour-visaged failure. He was a bright, impertinent Scotch terrier of a boy, and his discerning contemporaries called him Towzer.

But we must leave Towzer for the present and stick to Snap. Everyone was watching him now, and none more closely or more kindly than the man whom Snap considered chief of his born enemies, 'the Head.' 'Yes, he is a fine lad,' muttered that great man, 'I wish I knew how to manage him. He has stuff in him for anything.' And indeed he might have, though he was hardly good-looking. Tall and spare, with a lean, game look about the head, the first impression he made upon you was that he was a perfect athlete, one of Nature's chosen children. Every movement was so easy and so quick that you knew instinctively that he was strong, though he

hardly looked it; but his face puzzled you. It was a dark, sad-looking face, certainly not handsome, with firm jaw and somewhat rugged outlines, and yet there was a light sometimes in the big dark eyes which gave all the rest the lie, and made you feel that his masters might be right, after all, when they said, ‘There is no misdoing at Fernhall of which “that Hales” is not the leader.’

At any rate he appeared to be out of mischief just now.

‘Round the wicket, sir?’ asked the umpire as Snap took the ball in hand.

‘No, Charteris, over,’ was the short reply, as Hales turned to measure his run behind the sticks.

‘What! a new bowler?’ asked Hawker of the wicket-keeper as he took a fresh guard; ‘who is he?’

‘An importation from the Twenty-two; got his colours last week,’ answered Wyndham, and a smile spread over Hawker’s face, as he saw in fancy a timid beginner pitching him half-volleys to be lifted over the garden hedge, or leg-balls with which to break the slates on the pavilion.

But Hawker had to reserve his energy for a while, being much too good a cricketer to hit wildly at anything. With a quiet, easy action the new bowler sent down an ordinary good-length ball, too straight to take liberties with, and that was all. Hawker played it back to him confidently, but still carefully, and another, and another, of almost identical pitch and pace, followed the first. ‘Not so much to be made off this fellow after all,’ thought Hawker, ‘but he will

get loose like the rest by-and-by, no doubt.' Still it was not as good fun as he had expected. The fourth ball of Snap's first over was delivered with exactly the same action as its predecessors, but the pace was about double that of the others and Hawker was only just in time to stop it. It was so very nearly too much for the great man that for a moment it shook his confidence in his own infallibility. That momentary want of confidence ruined him. The last ball of the over was not nearly up to the standard of the other four ; it was short-pitched and off the wicket, but it had a lot of 'kick' in it, and Hawker had not come far enough out for it. There was an ominous click as the ball just touched the shoulder of his bat, and next moment, as long-slip remarked, he found it revolving in his hands 'like a stray planet.'

Don't talk to me of the lungs of the British tar, of the Irish stump orator, or even of the 'Grand Old Man' himself! They are nothing, nothing at all, to the lungs we had in those days. It was Snap's first wicket for the school, and Snap was the school's favourite, as the scapegrace of a family usually is, and caps flew up and fellows shouted until even Hawker didn't much regret his discomfiture if it gave the boys such pleasure. He was very fond of Fernhall boys, that sinewy man from the North, and, next to their own heroes, Fernhall liked him better than most men. Even now they show the window through which he jumped on all fours, and many a neck is nearly dislocated in trying to follow his example.

In the next over from his end Hales had to deal with Grey, and he found his match. He tried him

with slow ones, he tried him with fast ones, he tried to seduce him from the paths of virtue with the luscious lob, to storm him with the Eboracian pilule or ball from York. It was not a bit of good, up went the shutter, and a maiden over left Snap convinced that the less he had to do with Grey the better for him, and left Grey convinced that Fernhall had got a bowler at last who bowled with his head. Was it wilfully, I wonder, that Snap gave Grey on their next meeting a ball which that steady player hit for one? It may not have been, and yet there was a grin all over the boy's dark face as he saw Grey trot up to his end. That run cost Loamshire two batsmen in four balls—one bowled leg before wicket, and the other clean-bowled with an ordinary good-length ball rather faster than its fellows.

Those old fields rang with Hales's name that afternoon, and at 6.30, thanks chiefly to his superb bowling, the county had still two to score to win, and two wickets to fall. One of the men still in was Grey. At the end of the over the stumps would be drawn, and the game drawn against the school, even if (as he might do) Snap should bowl a maiden. That, however, could hardly be; even Grey would hit out at such a crisis. At the very first ball the whole school trembled with excitement. The Loamshire man played well back and stopped a very ugly one, fast and well pitched, but it would not be altogether denied, and curled in until it lay quiet and inoffensive, absolutely touching the stumps.

Ah, gentlemen of Loamshire! if you want to win this match why can't you keep quiet? Don't you

think the sight of that fatal little ball, nestling close up to his wicket, is enough to disconcert any batsman in the last over of a good match? And yet you cry, ‘Steady, Thompson, steady!’ Poor chap, you can see that he is all abroad, and the boy’s eyes at the other end are glittering with repressed excitement. He is fighting his first great battle in public, and knows it is a winning one. There is a sting and ‘devil’ in the fourth ball which would have made even Grace pull himself together. It sent Thompson’s bails over the long-stop’s head, and mowed down his wicket like ripe corn before a thunder-shower.

And now the chivalry of good cricket was apparent; Loamshire had no desire to ‘play out the time.’ Even as Thompson was bowled, another Loamshire man left the pavilion, ready for the fray. If it had been ‘cricket,’ Hawker, the Loamshire captain, would have gladly played out the match. As it was, his man was ready to finish the over. As the two men passed each other the new-comer gave his defeated friend a playful dig in the ribs, and remarked, ‘Here goes for the score of the match, Edward Anson, duck, not out! ’

As there was only one more ball to be bowled, and only two runs to be made to secure a win for Loamshire, I’m afraid Anson hardly meant what he said. Unless it shot underground or was absolutely out of reach, that young giant, who ‘could hit like anything, though not much of a bat,’ meant at any rate to hit that one ball for four. By George, how he opened his shoulders! how splendidly he lunged out! you could see the great muscles swell as he made the

bat sing through the air, you could almost see the ball going seaward ; and yet—and yet—

The school had risen like one man ; they had heard that rattle among the timber ; they knew that Snap's last 'yorker' had done the trick ; cool head and quick hand had pulled the match out of the fire, and even his rival Poynter was one of the crowd who caught young Hales, tossed him on to their shoulders, and bore him in triumph to the pavilion, whilst the chapel clock struck the half-hour.

CHAPTER II

'MOP FAUCIBUS HÆSIT'

Boys in the fifth form at Fernhall shared a study with one companion. Monitors of course lived in solitary splendour, with a bed which would stand on its head, and allowed itself to be shut up in a cupboard in the corner. Small boys who had not attained even to the fringe of the school aristocracy lived in herds in bare and exceedingly untidy rooms round the inner quads. Even in those days there were monitors who were worshippers of art. Some of them had curtains in their rooms of rich and varied colouring; one of them had a plate hung up which he declared was a piece of undoubted old Worcester. Tomlinson was a great authority on objects of *virtù*, and a rare connoisseur, but we changed his plate for one which we bought for sixpence at Newby's, and he never knew the difference. Then there was one fellow who had several original oil paintings. These represented farmyard scenes and were attributed indifferently to Landseer, Herring, and a number of other celebrated artists. Whoever painted them, these pictures were the objects of more desperate forays than any other property within the school limits. I remember them well as adorning the room of a certain

man of muscle, to whom, of course, they belonged merely as the spoils of war. The rightful owner lived three doors off, but I don't think that he ever had the pluck to attempt to regain his own.

However, in the small boys' rooms there were none of these luxuries of an effete civilisation. There was a book-shelf full of ragged books, none of which by any chance ever bore the name of anyone in that study; there was a table, a gas-burner, a frying-pan, and a kettle. These last-named articles might have been seen in every study at Fernhall, from the study of the monitor to that of the pauper, as we called that unfortunate being who had not yet emerged from the lower school. In the long nights of winter, when the wild sea roared just beyond the limits of their quad, and the spray came flying over the sea-wall to be dashed against their study windows, all Fernhall boys had a common consolation. They called it brewing: not the brewing of beer or of any intoxicating liquor, but of that cheering cup of tea which consoles so many thousands, from the London charwoman to the pig-tailed Chinaman, from the enervated Indian to the half-frozen Russian exile in Siberia. At first the head-masters of Fernhall tried hard to put down this practice. Sergeants lurked about our passages, confiscated our kettles, carried away the frying-pans full of curly rashers from under our longing eyes, and 'lines' and flagellations were all we got in exchange. At last a new era began. A great reformer arrived, a 'Head' of liberal leanings and wide sympathy. This man frowned on coercion, and, instead of taking away our kettles, gave us a huge range of stoves on which to

boil them. From a cook's point of view, no doubt, the range of stoves was a great improvement on the old gas-burner, but, in spite of the liberality of the ‘Head,’ small clusters of boys still stood night after night on those old study tables and patiently fried their bacon over the gas.

Unfortunately this was not the worst of their misdoings. Besides the appetising smell of the bacon and the delicious aroma of chicory or tea, there was too often a strong flavour of ‘bird’s-eye’ or ‘latakia’ about the passages. Almost to a man, the school smoked. How it had crept in I don’t pretend to know, but the habit had been growing in the school for years until it was almost universal. This was the one thing which our new head-master would not tolerate at any price, and it was pretty well understood throughout the school that his dealings with the first offender detected in the act would be short and severe. About the time of the Loamshire match he had taken to beating up our quarters in person, not, I think, from any desire to detect the smokers in the act, but from a hope that the fear of his coming might act as a deterrent. About a week after Snap Hales’s great bowling feat, Fernhall was brewing as usual: The dusk had fairly set in; a crowd of boys were jostling one another with the cans and frying-pans at the great public stoves, and Snap and many others were breaking school-rules as usual in their own studies. Mind, I am pledged to serve up my boys *au naturel* and not smothered in white sauce, so that if you don’t like my *menu* you had better take warning in time. The bacon had been finished, the

hot rolls from the tuckshop had been submitted to digestions which were capable of dealing even with hot rolls and butter, and now Snap Hales, Billy Winthrop, and one Simpson were desperately endeavouring to enjoy, or appear to enjoy, the forbidden pleasures of tobacco. Billy had an elaborately carved meerschaum between his teeth, while Snap lay full length on an extemporised divan, making strange noises and strange faces in his endeavours to get on terms with a ‘hubble-bubble.’ Billy’s jaws ached with the weight of the meerschaum, and Snap was as blown with trying to make his instrument of torture draw as if he had been running the school mile. Simpson was in a corner cutting up some ‘sun-dried honeydew,’ which he had procured in a cake—‘such,’ he said, ‘as the trappers of the North-West always use.’ To tell the truth, he liked ‘whittling’ at that cake of tobacco with his knife a great deal better than smoking it, for the first two or three whiffs invariably sent a cold chill through his frame and a conviction that, like Mark Twain, he had inadvertently swallowed an earthquake.

Suddenly the boys stopped talking; there was a heavy rap at the door, preceded by a vain attempt to open it, and followed by the command, in deep tones, to ‘open this door.’

‘Nix! by Jove!’ whispered Simpson, whiter now than ever with fright.

‘Rot!’ replied Snap unceremoniously. ‘It’s only that fool Lane, up to some of his jokes. Go to Bath, Legs,’ he added at the top of his voice.

‘Open this door at once,’ thundered someone on

the other side, while lock and hinge rattled beneath the besieger’s hands.

‘Don’t you wish you may get it, old chap,’ ‘Shove away, and be hanged to you,’ ‘Try your skull against the panel, blockhead,’ and several similar remarks, were now hurled at the enemy by those in the study. Meanwhile, preparations for repelling an assault were rapidly being made.

‘Boys, open this door, don’t you know who is speaking to you?’ said the voice once more.

‘Oh yes, we know,’ laughed Snap, ‘and we are getting ready to receive you, sir.’

‘Deuced well old Legs imitates the Head, doesn’t he?’ whispered Billy Winthrop.

‘Not badly,’ answered Snap in the same tone. ‘Have you got everything ready?’ he added.

‘Yes,’ said Billy; ‘but let me try my fire-arm first,’ and, dipping the nose of a large squirt into the inkpot, he filled it, and then discharged it at a venture through the key-hole. The result was satisfactory. From the sounds of anger and hasty retreat in the passages the boys guessed that the shot had told, and indulged in a burst of triumphant laughter in consequence. But the enemy was back again in a minute wrenching furiously at the door, which now began to give.

‘Let us die in the breach,’ cried Snap, catching up a large mop, which he had used earlier in the day to clean his study floor, and emptying over it the remains of the cold coffee. ‘Billy, stand by with your blunderbuss. Simpson, at the next shove let the door go!’ he whispered, and the boys took up their

places—Snap with his mop in rest opposite the entrance, Simpson with his hand on the key, and Billy's deadly weapon peeping over his leader's shoulder. At the next assault Simpson let the door go, and Hales rushed headlong out to meet the foe, getting the whole of Billy's charge down the back of his neck as he went. Someone knocked up the mop, so that it cannoned from him to another of the attacking party, whom it took fairly in the face, plastering him up against the opposite wall, a full-length portrait of 'the Head!'

For once Snap's spirits deserted him. The mop fell from his nerveless hand. He even forgot to say that he did not do it. It was too gross a sin even for a schoolboy to find excuses for. Nor had 'the Head' much to say—partly, perhaps, because 'mops and coffee' was not a favourite dish with him, and he had had rather more of it at his first essay than he cared to swallow, and partly, no doubt, because (diplomat though he was) for the life of him he could not remember what was the dignified thing to do under such unusual circumstances. The Sergeant recovered himself first.

'They've all been smoking, Sir!' he asserted maliciously. 'I suppose I'd better take their pipes.'

'Yes, Sergeant, and their names,' replied the Head.

'No need of that,' muttered our implacable foe. 'I know this here study better nor ever a one in Fernhall.'

'Hales, and you, Winthrop minor, report yourselves to me in my library after morning school tomorrow,' said the Head, and, slowly turning, the great

man went, his mortar-board somewhat on one side, while down the long cassock which he wore the streams of coffee ran.

Two minutes after his departure, No. 19, the scene of the fray, was full of friends and of sympathisers.

‘You’ll get sacked, of course,’ remarked one of these, ‘but,’ he added, ‘I don’t see that there is anything worse than that which Old Petticoats can do.’

‘You don’t think he could hang us, for instance, eh, Legs?’ asked Snap sarcastically. ‘Well, you are a nice, cheerful chap, you are!’ he added.

‘Never mind, old fellow,’ urged another, ‘they will give you a good enough character for Sandhurst, and what do you want more?’

‘You want a good deal for Sandhurst now, Viper!’ replied Snap; ‘they’d rather have a blind mathematician than a giant who didn’t know what nine times nine is.’

In spite of their comforters our friends felt for at least five minutes that there was something in their world amiss. Then suddenly Snap began to laugh, quite softly and to himself at first, but the laugh was infectious, so that in half a minute every boy in the passage was holding his sides, and laughing until the tears ran down his cheeks. By-and-by inquiries were made for Simpson, who had not been seen since the opening of the door. In answer to the shouts addressed to him, a sepulchral voice replied, and after some search the unfortunate wretch was produced from behind the door, white with fear and tobacco-smoke, flat as a cake of his own beloved honeydew, his knees trembling, and his hair on end with terror.

Luckily for him, he had drawn the door back upon himself, and had remained unnoticed behind it ever since.

In spite of the tragedy with which it had begun, the remainder of the evening was spent in adding one more to the works of art which adorn Boot Hall Row, to wit, one life-size portrait of the Very Reverend the Head-master of Fernhall, drawn upon the wall against which he had so recently been flattened, in charcoal, by one Snap Hales ; while underneath was written, to instruct future generations :

IN MEMORIAM, JUNE 22, 1874.

'MOP FAUCIBUS HÆSIT.'

CHAPTER III

SNAP'S REDEMPTION

It was all very well to keep a stiff upper lip when the other boys were looking on, but when Snap and Towzer got up to their dormitories they began to give way to very gloomy thoughts indeed. Snap Hales especially had a bad time of it with his own thoughts. It did not matter so much for young Winthrop. His mother was a rich woman and an indulgent one. His expulsion would grieve her, but he would coax her to forgive him in less than no time, he knew. It was very different for Snap. He had no mother, nor any relative but a guardian, who was as strict as a Pharisee, and too poor himself to help Snap, even if he had had the will to, which he had not. Over and over again Snap had been told that his whole future depended on his school career, and it appeared to him that that career was about to come to a speedy and by no means honourable end.

But that was not all. Snap's greatest friend on earth was his school-chum's mother. Mrs. Winthrop had always been almost a mother to Snap, and had won the boy's heart by the confidence she showed in him. Snap didn't like being expelled ; he didn't like

Towzer being expelled ; but still less did he like the prospect of being told that he, Snap Hales, had led the young one into mischief. And yet that was what was before him. Snap was sitting on the edge of his bed, half undressed, and meditating somewhat in this miserable fashion, when a bolster caught him full in the face. Looking up quickly, he caught sight of a face he knew grinning at him over his partition. It was one of B. dormitory. B. had had the impertinence to attack F. That bolster was the gage of battle. Silently Snap slipped out, bolster in hand. Someone had relit the gas and turned it up as high as he dared. Round and under it were ten or a dozen white-robed figures, armed with what had once been pillows, but now resembled nothing so much as thick ropes with a huge knot at the end.

A week ago Snap had crept into B. dormitory and driven a block of yellow soap well home into the open mouth of the captain of B. That hero's snores had ceased, but he had sworn vengeance as soon as he was able to swear anything. This then was B.'s vengeance, and the blows of the contending parties fell like hail. At first, respect for their master's beauty-sleep kept them quiet, and they fought grimly and quietly like rats in a corner. Gradually, though, their spirits rose, and the noise of battle increased. 'Go it, Snap, bash his head in,' cried one. 'Let him have it in the wind,' retorted another, and all the while even the speakers were fighting for dear life.

Suddenly a diversion occurred which B. to this day declares saved F. from annihilation. Unobserved by any of the combatants, a short man with an

enormous 'corporation' had stealthily approached them, the first intimation which they had of his presence being the stinging cuts from his cane on their almost naked bodies. No one stopped for a second dose, so that the little man was pouring out the vials of his wrathful eloquence over a quiet and orderly room, when his gaze suddenly lit upon an ungainly figure trying to sneak unobserved into B. room. It was the miserable Postlethwaite, butt and laughing-stock of both rooms, who, having no taste for hard knocks, had been quietly learning his repetition for the next day by the light of a half-extinguished gas-jet in the corridor. Like a hawk upon its prey, the man with the figure pounced upon poor Postlethwaite.

'What brings you out here, sir?' he cried.
'What do you mean by it, sir? Why aren't you in bed, sir?'

'Please, sir,' began Postlethwaite.

'Don't answer me, sir,' thundered the master.
'You don't please me, sir! you're the most impudent boy in the school, sir! Do me a thousand lines to-morrow, sir!'

'Please, sir——'

'Please, sir, please, sir, didn't I tell you not to say, please, sir?' cried the now furious pedagogue, fairly dancing with rage, butting at the trembling lout with his portly stomach, and driving his flaming little nose and bright eyes almost into his victim's face.

Poor 'Postle' was now a trembling white shadow nearly six feet high, penned in a corner, with the

solid round figure of his foe dancing angrily in front of him.

'Please, sir, please, sir,' continued the master savagely. 'I'll please you, sir. I'll thrash you within an inch of your life. I'll cane you on the spot, sir!'

'Please, sir,' whined the miserable Postle, and this time he would be heard. 'Please, sir, I haven't got a spot, sir!'

An uncontrollable titter burst from all those hitherto silent beds, and the fiercest-mannered and kindest-hearted little man in Fernhall retired to his room, to indulge in an Homeric laugh, having set a score of impositions, not one of which he would remember next day. As for Postle, he crept away, quite ignorant that he had made a joke, but terribly nervous lest his enemy should again find him out.

Next morning, after lecture, Snap Hales was preparing with Billy Winthrop to meet his doom. They had hardly had time to exchange a dozen words with Frank Winthrop since the event of the night before, and now as they approached the Head's house they saw him coming towards them. His honest brown face wore a graver look than usual, and even Snap felt his friend's unspoken rebuke.

'You fellows need not go up to the Head,' he said quietly, 'the monitors have leave to deal with your case.'

That was all, and our school-hero passed on; but his words raised a world of speculation in our minds, for the whole school, of course, knew at once of this message to Snap and Towzer. Of course we under-

stood that the monitors could, in exceptional cases, interfere, and from time to time used their privilege, but this was mostly in such disgraceful cases as were best punished privately. A thief might be tried and punished by the upper twelve, but not a mere breaker of school-rules. Even expulsion need not carry more than school disgrace with it, but the sentence of the monitors' court meant the cut direct from Fernhall boys, now and always, at Fernhall, and afterwards in the world. And what had even Hales or Towzer done to merit this?

The half-hour before dinner was passed in speculation. Then someone put up a notice on the notice-board, and we were told by one who was near enough to read it that it was to the effect that the monitors would hold a roll call directly after dinner in place of the usual first hour of school, and at this every Fernhall boy was specially warned to be present. There was no need to enforce this. Every name was answered to at that roll-call, and, for once, in every case by the boy who bore it.

The roll call was held in the big schoolroom, a huge and somewhat bare building, full of rough ink-stained desks and benches, with a raised platform at the further end. On this, when the roll-call was over, stood the whole Sixth, with their prisoners, Snap and Towzer. Frank was there (the captain of the Eleven), and beside him even a greater than he, the School captain, Wyndham—first in the schools, first in the football-field, and first in everything, except perhaps cricket, at which his old chum Frank Winthrop was possibly a little better than he. I think that,

much as we admired Winthrop, Wyndham was first of our school heroes. He could do so many things, and did them all well.

After everyone had answered his name a great hush of expectation fell upon us all. Then Wyndham came to the front and spoke. We had none of us heard many speeches in those days ; would that at least in that respect life in the world were more like old school times ! Perhaps it was because it was the first speech that we had ever heard that it roused us so. Perhaps it was a very poor affair really. But I know that we thought none of those old Athenians would have 'been in it' with Wyndham, and I personally can remember all he said even now. There were no masters present, of course, so that he spoke sometimes even in school slang, a boy talking to boys, and plunged right into the middle of what he had to say at once.

' You know,' he said, ' the scrape into which Hales and Winthrop minor have got themselves, and you probably know what the punishment is for an offence like theirs. What the punishment ought to be, I mean. Your Head-master is going to leave it to you to say what their punishment shall be ; it is for you to say whether they shall go or stay.'

' Oh yes, I know,' Wyndham continued as he was half of us with our hands raised, or our mouths open, ' you are ready to pronounce sentence now. But it won't do. You must hear me out first. I am here by Mr. Foulkes's permission to plead for Hales and Winthrop, and I had to beg hard for that permission, for the breach of school rules was as bad as it could

be. Not, mind you, that our Head cared twopence about the mop ; he laughed, when he told me of that, as much as you fellows could have done ; but he won't have smoking at any price, and he is justly annoyed, because, in spite of the serious scrape they were in, two of the boys reported to him for the disturbance in F. dormitory last night were Hales and Winthrop. You know the Head remembers quite as well as we do how splendidly Hales pulled the Loamshire match out of the fire ' (cheers), ' and he wants to keep him at Fernhall ; but you know discipline is more essential in a school than a good bowler in an eleven.

' Now, then, as to this smoking. I am not going to talk any soft rubbish to you fellows. We have all smoked. I *have* certainly, and I told the Head that if Hales went I ought to go. It was a great deal worse in us than in you fellows. We ought to have set an example and did not. As to the sin of smoking I haven't a word to say. My father smokes, and he is the best man I know. There is no mention of tobacco in the Bible, so the use of it can't have been forbidden there. It isn't bad form, whatever some folks say, for the first gentleman in Europe sets us the example ; but (and here is the point) it is a vice in a Fernhall boy because it is a breach of discipline. Now, that ought to be enough for boys half of whom want commissions in the army, the very breath of whose life is discipline ; but, as we are discussing this thing amongst ourselves quietly, I'll tell you why I think the Head considers smoking a bad thing for us. We are all youngsters and have our work to do. To do it well, we want clear heads and sound minds:

Tobacco is a sedative, and sends the brain to sleep—soothes it, say the smokers. Quite so, by rendering it torpid. Men don't paint or write with their pipes in their mouths. They may dream with them there before beginning the day's work, or doze with them there when the work is done, but down they go when the chapter has to be written or the portrait painted. As to the effect of tobacco on your bodies, you know as well as I do whether the men who win the big races are heavy smokers. Why! I would as soon eat a couple of apples before running the mile as smoke a pipe. Besides all this, we can't afford to smoke good tobacco, and bad tobacco is poison. We don't want loafers, and smoking means loafing. You don't play football or cricket with a pipe in your mouth, do you? No! and I want more players and fewer smokers. Old Fernhill has never yet taken a back seat in school athletics' (here the cheering silenced the speaker). 'Very well, then don't let her now; but, mind you, "jumpy" nerves won't win the Ashburton shield, or short winds break the mile record.

'I want the school to give up smoking. I've been here now longer than any of you, and I love the old school more than any of you can love her. She has made me, God bless her, and I want to do her one good turn before I leave' (here Wyndham's voice got quite husky, but I suppose it was only a touch of hay-fever). 'I believe most of you fellows would like to do me a good turn' (shouts of applause). 'I'm sure that there is no Fernhill boy to whom I would not do one' (here the very oak benches seemed in danger of being broken. The enthusiasm was getting dangerous). 'If that is so,'

he continued, 'give up smoking until you leave Fernhall. The Head is sick of trying to stop smoking by punishment. He says that the whip is not the thing to manage a good horse with, and he believes heart and soul in his boys. He does not want to see the school fail in its sports. He doesn't want to sack Towzer and Snap' (dear old chap, he even knew our nicknames), 'but as head of this school, as colonel of our regiment, he must and will have discipline. So he puts it to you in this way, and he puts you on your honour as gentlemen to keep to his terms if you accept them.'

'If you choose voluntarily to pledge yourselves to give up smoking as a body, he on his part will ignore the events of last night altogether' (wild excitement in the pit). 'Now, Fernhall, will you show you're worthy of such a brick as our Head? Will you do me one good turn before I leave? Will you keep Towzer and Snap, or your pipes?'

'Towzer and Snap! Towzer and Snap!' came the answer from four hundred boys' voices, in a regular storm of eager reply.

'Very well, hands up for the boys,' said the Captain, and a forest of hard young fists went up into the air.

'Hands up for the pipes,' cried Wyndham with a grin. Not a hand stirred.

'Bravo, gentlemen. I accept your promise. The monitors have handed over all their own pipes, cigars, and other smoking paraphernalia to the Head. We did that before coming to you. Now we want you to hand over all your pipes to us, to be labelled, stored,

and returned when you leave. It is agreed, I suppose,' and not waiting for an answer he turned and shook hands with Snap and Towzer, and then, pushing them off the platform, he said, 'There, take them back, you fellows ; they are a bad lot, I'm afraid, but I think you have bought them a bargain.'

Snap and Towzer hardly realised what had happened to them for the first few minutes. When they did they bolted up to the Head to thank him. No one ever saw Hales so subdued as he was that afternoon. He had pulled steadily against the powers that be ever since he had come to school, yet when he came down from the library all he could say was, 'By George, he's a trump. Why! he chaffed me about the mop, and wanted to know if we all used mops to clean out our brew-cans.'

The array of pipes, ranging from the black but homely 'cutty' to a *chef d'œuvre* in amber and meer-schaum, which filled one of Mr. Foulkes's big cupboards, was a sight worth seeing, and if the time of our mile was not better next year it certainly was not worse : there were more players in the football field, and the fact that they had bought back their two favourites by a piece of self-denial did much to elevate the character, not only of the redeemed ones, but of the School itself.

For one whole term (until Wyndham left) not a pipe was smoked within the school limits, and if smoking ever did go on again it certainly never again became the fashion, but was looked on rather as a loafer's habit than as the badge of manhood.

CHAPTER IV

THE FERNHALL GHOST

FOR a week after the reprieve recorded in the last chapter Snap and Towzer went about like cats who had been whipped for stealing cream. They honestly desired not to be led into temptation, and hoped that no one would leave the jug on the floor. For a week, perhaps, even if this had happened, these two penitent kittens would have made believe that they did not see it.

The holidays were now rapidly approaching, and the glorious July weather seemed expressly sent for the gorgeous frocks and sweetly pretty faces which would soon adorn playground and chapel during ‘prize week.’

Snap and Towzer were in Frank Winthrop’s study, Towzer getting his big brother’s tea ready, and Snap looking on. After a while the conversation turned upon a subject of immense interest, just then, to all Fernhall boys.

‘Major,’ said Snap to Winthrop the elder, ‘what do you fellows think of the ghost?’

‘Think!’ replied the monitor with wonderful dignity, ‘why, that you lower school fellows have been getting out of your dormitories and playing tunes

upon combs, jew's-harps, and other instruments of music, when you ought to have been asleep, with a lump of yellow soap between your jaws to keep you quiet.'

'Oh, stow that,' replied Snap, 'fellows don't play such tunes as the Head has heard for the last week on jew's-harps and combs. Either those fellows who belong to the "concert lot" had a hand in it, or there is something fishy about it. I say, Frank, be a good chap and tell us, are the Sixth in it?'

'The Sixth in it, I should think not,' replied Winthrop; 'but I can't answer for all the monitors, even if I wanted to.'

Snap winked at Towzer at this rather cautious denial, remarking:

'Well, it is a good thing the ghost has not forgotten his music. He has been here every year since Fernhall was a school.'

'Yes,' broke in Billy, lifting his snub nose from the depths of an empty coffee-cup, 'and to-night is the night of the Ninth; the night, you know, on which *it* walks round the Nix's garden and across the lawn.'

'Does it?' quoth Frank. 'Well, if it is wise, it won't walk across that lawn to-night. If it does, it will get snuff, I can tell you.'

'Why, Major, why should it get "bottled" to-night more than any other night, and who is to "bottle" a ghost?' inquired Snap indignantly.

'Never you mind, young 'un, but you may bet your bottom dollar that if the ghost walks to-night it will be walking in the quad at punishment drill for the rest of this term.'

As this was all the boys could get from their senior, they had to be content with it, and before long took their departure. At the bottom of the stairs Snap took Billy's arm, and conferred earnestly with him as to what the great man's prophecy might mean.

'Well, you see,' said Towzer, looking abnormally wise, 'old Frank is precious thick with the Beauty' (a daughter of 'the Head'), 'and after the match the other day I saw them having a long talk together, and, unless I am mistaken, he was showing her just the way the ghost ought to come.'

'By Jove, Towzer,' cried Snap, 'Scotland Yard won't have a chance with you when you grow up. One of the "Shilling Shockers" detectives would be a fool to you. You've got it, my lad; there is a deep-laid and terrible plot on foot, as the papers say, and one aimed at a time-honoured and respected institution, our friend the ghost. Let's go and see Elizabeth.'

Now Elizabeth was a lady, if a kind heart and gentle ways with small boys could make her one, although the humble office which she held was that of needlewoman at Fernhall. In these degenerate days a maid-servant and a wife together are supposed to mend me, tend me, and attach the fickle button to the too often deserted shirt. But they are only supposed to. They don't as a matter of fact, and indeed the manner of life of my buttons is decidedly loose. But in those old days the ancient needlewoman of Fernhall wielded no idle weapon. Her needle and thimble were the sword and shield with

which she attacked and overcame the untidiness of four hundred boys, and in spite of the wild tugging at buttons and collars as the Irishman of the dormitory sang out ‘Bell fast,’ ‘Double in,’ while the last of the chapel chimes were in the air, no clean shirt at any rate came buttonless to the scratch.

To Elizabeth, then, the boys betook themselves, and, being special favourites, she took them into her own little snuggery, and they had tea again. Oh no, don’t feel alarmed, gentle reader: two teas, ten teas if you like, matter nothing to Fernhall boys—their hides are elastic, and even the pancakes of Shrove Tuesday merely cause a slight depression of spirits for the next twenty-four hours.

‘Now, ’Lizabeth, you dear old brick, we want you to tell us something. What’s up to-night at “the house”?’

‘Nothing that I know of, Master Winthrop, except that some of them officers is a coming up from their barracks to dinner with Miss Beauty and the other young ladies as is staying here.’

‘Oh! o—o—oh, as the man said when the brickbat hit him where he’d meant to put his dinner; and what, Lizzie darling, may they be going to do after dinner?’

‘Piano-punching, I suppose, dear, and a little chess with the governor; and then what——?’

‘Bed? It will be slow for them, won’t it?’

‘No, Master Hales, piano-punching indeed, when Miss Beauty plays sweet enough to wake the blessed dead.’

‘Did wake them, “Grannie,” the other night,

didn't she, and they seem to have taken an active share in the musical part of the entertainment ?'

'There's no talking with such a random boy as you, but there, if you want to know, that's just what they have all come about. They say that when Miss Beauty was going to bed the other night she heard that soft, wailing music, like what we hear here every year just about this time, and she was so sure that there was something really unnatural about it that the Professor has given her leave to sit up with the other guests, and Captain Lowndes, and the rest in the monitors' common room, to see if they can catch the ghost, and for goodness sake don't you say as I told you, but if you knows the ghost tell him not to walk to-night, as the Professor says such nonsense must be stamped out for good. There now !'

Poor old Elizabeth looked as if she had committed a crime, and puffed and blew and pulled at her two little chin tufts (for, alas, she was bearded like the pard) in a way that nearly sent the boys into convulsions at her own tea-table. But they contained themselves (and about three plates full of muffins), and by-and-by departed.

There was a long and earnest conversation in a certain study that night. There was a surplice missing from amongst the properties of the choir, and then the four hundred wended sleepily from chapel to their dormitories.

In half an hour the lights were out in all windows save those of the head-master's house ; stillness fell upon Fernhall ; a big bright moon came out upon the scene and made those long grass meadows gleam like

the silver sea just beyond them ; a bat or two whirled about above the master's orchard, and but for them, and the merry party up at the house, Fernhall, once the smuggler's home, now the busy public school, slept to the lullaby of the summer waves.

Fernhall slept, its busy brain as quiet as if no memories of an evil past hung thickly round that grey old house by the sea. Could it be that such evil deeds were done there in the storied days of old ? At least there was some ground for the country folks' legends and superstitions. Not a rood of ground under or around the 'House' was solid ; it was all a great warren, only that the tunnelling and burrowing had been done by men and not by conies.

Under the basement of the head-master's house were huge cellars, such cellars as would have appeared a world too wide even for the most bibulous of scholars. A cupboard of very tiny dimensions would have held all the strong liquors which our Head drank in a year. These cellars had two entrances, one from the house, and the other half a mile away, below what was now low-water mark. For year by year the waves encroach upon Fernhall, and in time those old smugglers who made and used these vaults will get their own again. They, no doubt, many of them, have gone to Davy Jones's locker, but their chief sleeps sound on shore, in a stately vault, which blazons his name and his virtues to the world. In his day smuggling was a remunerative and genteel profession, and he and all his race were past masters in the craft. Living far from the great centres of life, upon a bleak and

dangerous coast, little notice was taken of the quiet old squire who yearly added acre to acre and whiled away the cheerless days with such innocent pursuits as sea-fishing and yachting.

Fernhall yokels say that the last squire and his wife did not agree. She was not a native of the Fernhall moorland, but a soft south-country thing with a laugh in her eye and bright clothes on her back when she first came amongst them ; a parson's daughter, some said, but no one knew and few cared. Very soon she grew, like the rest of the people round her, silent, serious, or sad—a quiet grey shadow, with the laugh and bright clothes stored away perhaps somewhere with her memories of that sunny south. All at once her face was missed from church and market, but no one cared to ask whither she had gone. Someone, with grim Fernhall humour, suggested that the Squire had added to the 'spirits' in his subterranean vaults.

That was all, then, and to-night was the anniversary of her strange disappearance. There are nights when the world is still and you can feel that she is resting. There are other nights when the stillness is as deep, nay, deeper ; but it is not the stillness of rest. The silence is throbbing and alive with some sad secret, and the listening earth is straining to catch it. This was such a night. The whitely gleaming grass stretched away until it reached a vague land of moonlit shadows. The waves were almost articulate in their moanings. The leaves of the poplars kept showing their white underside in the moonlight, until the whole trees swung in the night

breeze, a grove of sheeted spectres. Anyone watching the scene was at once seized with the idea that something was going to happen, and, like the watchful stars and bending trees, strained every nerve to listen.

At last it came, faint and far off, sad but unutterably sweet, a low wail of plaintive music—so low that at first it seemed the mere coinage of an overwrought fancy. Nearer it came, and nearer, now growing into a full wave of sound, now ebbing away—the mere echo of a sigh, but always coming nearer and nearer, until it seemed to pause irresolutely by the gate which divides the master's garden from the monitors' lawn. Was it another fancy, or were there for a moment a crowd of white, eager faces pressed against the window which looks upon that lawn? Fancy assuredly, for the moon now gleamed back blankly from the glass. For a moment a little cloud no bigger than a man's hand passed over the moon, and as it cleared away a deep-drawn sigh attracted the watcher's eyes to the garden gate. The moon was full upon it; you could see it shake if it shook ever so little. In that listening midnight you could almost hear the flowers whispering to each other, but the gate neither creaked nor shook, and yet someone had passed through it, someone with bent head, and slow, tired feet, who sighed and told the beads of her rosary as she passed. The moonlight played strange tricks that night; it seemed to cling to and follow that silent figure, leaving a white track on the dew-laden grass. And now it paused for one moment before that window, through which those tear-dimmed eyes had so often and so longingly

turned towards her own loved south, and as she paused the silence broke, the window was dashed open, and three athletic figures, figures of men who feared neither man nor devil, sprang out with shouts of laughter, surrounded that white figure, still so strangely quiet, and demanded—its name! At the open window from which the three had issued were now gathered half a dozen ladies, looking half amused, half frightened. Among them was Beauty, the Head's daughter.

With boisterous laughter, that jarred harshly upon the stillness of that midsummer night, the three had dashed upon their prey. Why, then, do they pause? It seemed to those who watched that some whisper had reached their ears and chilled their courage. For one moment the figure's arms were raised aloft, and then the men recoiled, and it passed on as if unconscious of these things of clay, steady and stately, with head bent, slow feet, and hands which still told the rosary beads. For a moment it stood large and luminous on the skyline of that hill which overhangs the sea, the favourite 'look-out' of the old lords of Fernhall; for a moment it raised its sheeted arms as if calling down a curse upon the fated mansion, and then floated seaward and was gone.

The chapel-bell tolled one, and again the Fernhall ghost had baffled the inquisitive investigations of disbelieving men, and had asserted itself in spite of the nineteenth century, the —th Regiment, and the new Head-master. In vain Beauty sought an explanation from her discomfited cavaliers; all she could elicit was that there was something uncanny about it,

something not fit for ladies to hear, and she had better go to bed and think no more about it. It would not come again for a year, anyway. So, at last, mightily dissatisfied, the ladies went, and when the men were driving home to barracks long and heartily pealed their laughter and gallant Captain Lowndes vowed again and again that 'That boy would make a right good soldier, sir, hang me if he wouldn't! What was it he said again, the young scoundrel? "I've not a rag on except this surplice, Captain, and, by Jove, if you don't take your hands off I'll drop that. If the ladies don't like me in the spirit, I must appear in the flesh."'

CHAPTER V

THE ADMIRAL'S 'SOCK-DOLLAGER'

'WELL, Snap, how are you this morning? You look very down in the mouth.'

'Yes, sir, I don't feel very lively,' replied Snap.

The speakers were Admiral Christopher Winthrop and our old friend Harold, or Snap Hales. The mid-summer term had come to an end, and the boys were all at home at Fairbury for the holidays. Frank and Billy Winthrop were somewhere about the home-farm, and the old Admiral was down at the bottom of the lawn, by the famous brook, intent on the capture of a certain 'sock-dollager' who had been fighting a duel with the sailor for the last three weeks. So far the cunning and shyness of the trout had been more than a match for the skill and perseverance of the red-faced, grey-haired old gentleman on the bank, but the Admiral had served a long apprenticeship in all field-sports, and it would go hard with him if that four-pounder did not, sooner or later, lie gasping at his feet.

'Try an alder, sir,' suggested Snap, who, though no fisherman himself, had long since learnt the name of every fly in the Admiral's book.

'No,' replied that worthy disciple of Walton, 'I'll

give him just one more turn with the dun,' and, so saying, he proceeded with the greatest care to strain the gut of another of Ogden's beautiful little flies.

'But what is the matter with you, Snap, that you are not, as you say, very lively?' urged the Admiral, speaking with some difficulty, his mouth being at the moment full of dry gut.

'Characters came to-day, Admiral,' replied Snap; 'didn't you get Frank's and Billy's?'

'Yes, and a precious bad one Master Billy's was; the only good part of it was the writing. Mr. Smith writes:—"Hand-writing shows great improvement; is diligent and anxious to improve." Unfortunately Billy's writing speaks for itself, even if, like me, you can't read a word of it.' And the old man chuckled to himself at his own shrewdness.

'Frank's was good enough, I suppose, sir?' asked Snap.

'Yes, Hales, as good as it could be. Frank is one of the right sort. He can work like a—like a Winthrop (and the old boy swelled with pride), and play like a—'

'Vernon,' said a soft, sweet voice behind the Admiral, who, turning, found himself face to face with his sister-in-law, a slight, graceful woman, who was beautiful still, in spite of the grey in her hair and the lines which showed that trouble had not spared even sweet Dolly Vernon, as her friends had called her before she married the dead squire of Fairbury.

'Ah, Chris! Chris!' she cried, shaking her finger at him, 'what a vain old sea-dog you are! So, all my

boy's virtues are Winthrop, and all his vices Vernon, are they? For shame, sir!'

The Admiral had been supreme on his own quarter-deck; he was still supposed to be supreme about the home farm and in the coverts. As a matter of fact, he was nothing of the kind, but simply his fair sister's most loyal henchman and most obedient slave. When his brother had died, leaving Mrs. Winthrop with two great boys to bring up and the estate to manage, the Admiral had at first acted as his sister-in-law's agent from a distance. As the years went on, and the boys grew up, the Admiral found that the management of the estate from a distance was more than he could undertake, so that at last he had settled in a little cottage in the park, and practically lived with his sister-in-law at the Hall.

'Yes, sister, yes,' replied the old gentleman apologetically, '"plays like a Vernon," of course that's what I meant; and you know,' he added slyly, 'that Dr. Foulkes said that his cricket was, if anything, better than his classics.'

'And how about his vices?' persisted Mrs. Winthrop.

'Pooh! Frank hasn't got any,' asserted her brother-in-law.

'Hasn't he?' she asked with a little doubtful smile; 'and what do you say to that, Harold? You are his bosom friend.'

Snap reddened up to the eyes.

'No, Mrs. Winthrop, I don't think he has. Dr. Foulkes seems to think they all belong to me. My uncle says that according to my character I have a

monopoly of all the qualities undesirable in a boy who has his way to make in the world.'

Although he spoke jestingly, Mrs. Winthrop knew enough of Snap to see that there was a good deal of earnest in his jest. His guardian, Mr. Howell Hales, a solicitor in large practice, had never had time or inclination to do more than his bare duty by his fatherless nephew, so that Fairbury Court had become the boy's real home, and Mrs. Winthrop almost unconsciously had filled the place of mother to him.

'What is it, Snap,' she said now, laying her hand on his strong young arm, and looking up into his face inquiringly, 'have you got a worse character than usual?'

'Yes! worse than usual,' laughed Snap grimly; and then, seeing that his hard tone had hurt his gentle friend, his voice softened, and he added, 'Yes, Mrs. Winthrop, it is very bad this time, so bad that the Head doesn't want me to go back next term.'

'Not to go back next term? why, that's expulsion,' blurted out the Admiral.

'No, sir, not quite as bad as that; it's dismissal,' suggested Snap.

'I don't see any difference. Chopping straws I call that,' said old Winthrop.

'Splitting hairs don't you mean, Chris?' asked Mrs. Winthrop with a half-smile; 'but I see the difference, Snap. There is no disgrace about this, is there?'

'No, I didn't think so,' replied Snap, 'but my uncle says I am a disgrace to my family and always shall be.'

'He always did say that,' muttered the Admiral.

'Never mind what your uncle says; I mean,' added the old gentleman, correcting himself, 'don't take it too much to heart. You see he has very strict ideas of what young lads should be.'

'What is it that you have been doing, Snap? Is it too bad to tell me?' asked Mrs. Winthrop after a while.

For a moment the boy hung his head, thinking, and then raised it with a proud look in his eyes.

'No, dear,' he said, dropping unconsciously into an old habit, 'it isn't, and so it can't be very bad!' And with that he told the whole foolish story of his share in the smoking orgy, of his reprieve, of the mop incident and the bolster fight, and, last of all, of that Fernhall ghost.

At this part of the recital of his wrongdoings the Admiral's face, which had been growing redder and redder all the time, got fairly beyond control, and the old gentleman nearly went into convulsions of laughter. 'Shameful, sir; gross breach of discipline, sir; ha! ha! ha!' "Don't like me in the spirit, had better take me in the flesh." Capital—cap—infamous, I mean, infamous. Your uncle never did anything like that, sir, not he,' spluttered the veteran; 'couldn't have done if he had tried,' he added *sotto voce*.

'But,' said Mrs. Winthrop, after a pause, 'what are you going to do, Snap?'

'My uncle wants me to go into the Church or Mr. Mathieson's office,' replied the boy.

'The Church or Mr. Mathieson's office—that is a strange choice, isn't it?' asked his friend. 'Which do you mean to do?'

'Neither,' answered Snap stoutly; 'I'm not fit for one, and I should do no good in the other. I shall do what some other fellows I know have done. I'll emigrate and turn cow-boy. I like hard work and could do it,' and half consciously he held out one of his sinewy brown hands, and looked at it as if it was a witness for him in this matter.

'What does your uncle say to that, Snap?' asked the Admiral.

'Not much, sir, bad or good. He says I am an ungrateful young wretch for refusing to go into Mr. Mathieson's office, and that I shall never come to any good. But, then, I've heard that from him often enough before,' said Snap grimly, 'and I think he will let me go, and that is the main point.'

'And when do you mean to start?' asked the Admiral.

'Oh, as soon as he will let me, sir. You see, my father left me a few hundred pounds, so that I dare say when Mr. Hales sees that my mind is made up he will let me go. You don't think much worse of me, I hope, sir, do you?'

'Worse of you?' said the old sailor stoutly, 'no! You are a young fool, I dare say, but so was I at your time of life. Come up to lunch!' And, planting his rod by the side of the stream, he turned towards the house, Mrs. Winthrop and Snap following him.

At lunch Snap had to tell the whole story again to Billy and Frank, but when he came to the point at which he had decided to 'go west,' instead of eliciting the sympathy of his audience, he only seemed to rouse their envy.

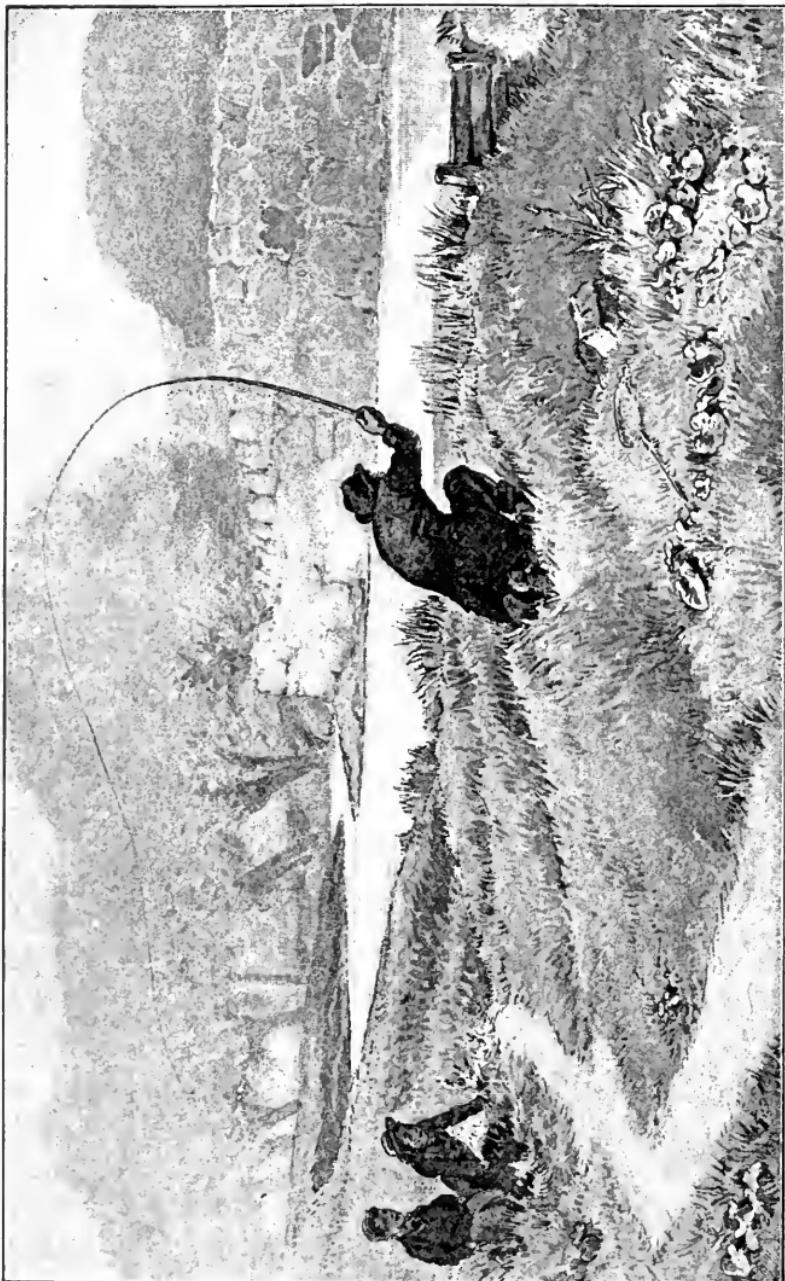
'By Jove,' said Frank, 'if it wasn't for this jolly old place I should wish that I had got your character and your punishment, Snap!'

For a week or more both the Admiral and his sister had been very unlike their old selves, so quiet were they and *distrait*, except when by an effort one or the other seemed to rouse to a mood whose merriness had something false and strained in it, even to the unobservant young eyes of the boys. Why was it that at this speech of Frank's Mrs. Winthrop's sweet eyes filled with sudden tears, and that piece of pickle went the wrong way and almost choked the Admiral? Perhaps, if you follow the story further, you may be able to guess.

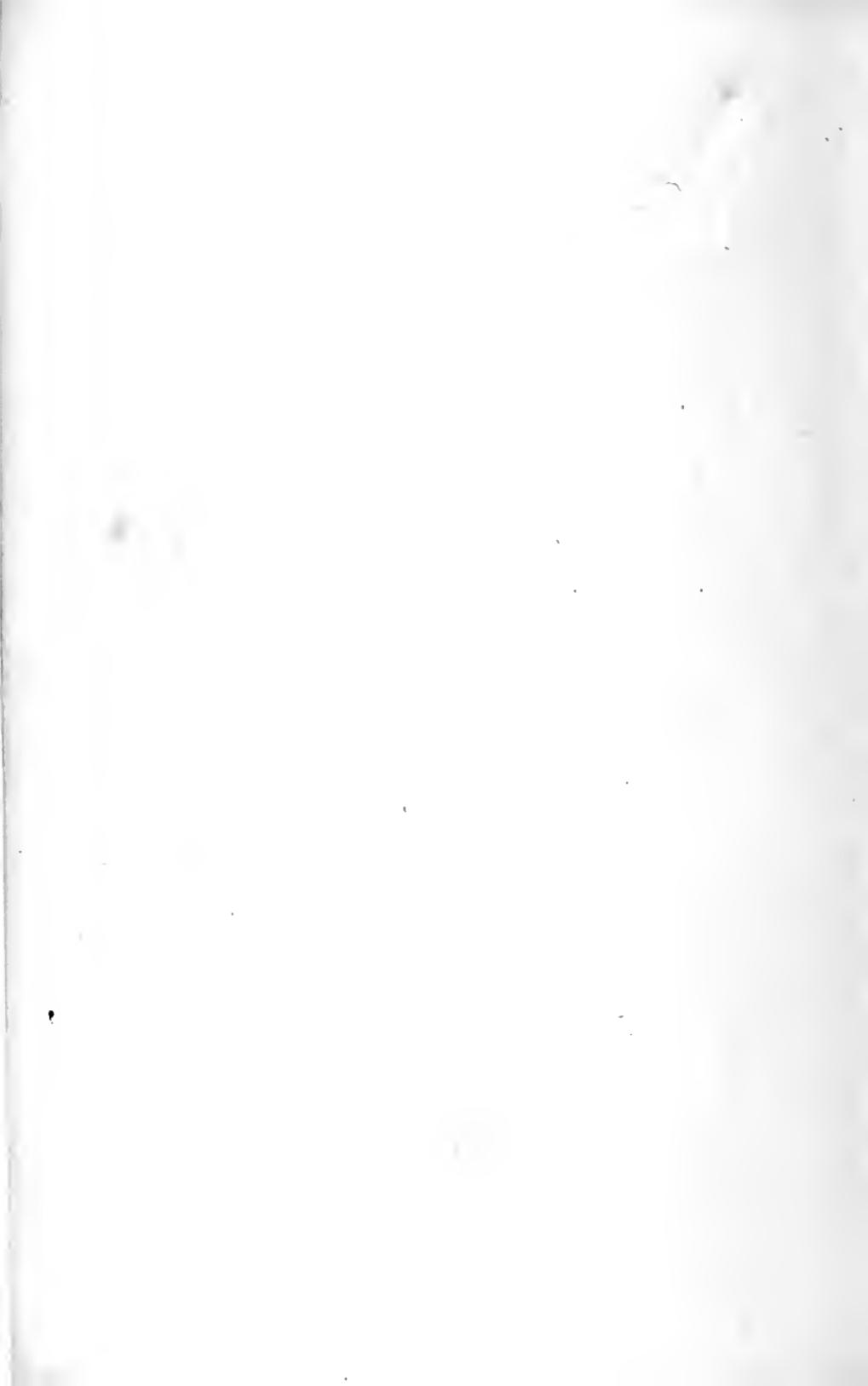
After lunch they all wandered down again to the trout-stream, where 'Uncle's Ogden,' as they called the Admiral's rod, stood planted in the ground, like the spear of some knight-errant of old days. It was a lovely spot, this home of the Winthrops—such a home as exists only in England; beautiful by nature, beautiful by art, mellowed by age, and endeared to the owners by centuries of happy memories. The sunlight loved it and lingered about it in one moss-grown corner or another from the first glimpse of dawn to the last red ray of sunset. The house had been built in a hollow, after the unsanitary fashion of our forefathers; round it closed a rampart of low wooded hills, which sheltered its grey gables from the winter winds; and in front of it a close-cropped lawn ran from the open French windows of the morning-room to the sunlit ripples of the little river Tane as it raced away to the mill on the home-farm.

For five centuries the Winthrops had lived at Fairbury, not brilliantly, perhaps, but happily and honestly, as squires who knew that their tenants' interests and their own were identical ; sometimes as soldiers who went away to fight for the land they loved, only to come back to enjoy in it the honours they had won. It was a fair home and a fair name, and so far, in five centuries, none of the race had done anything to bring either into disrepute. No wonder the Winthrops loved Fairbury.

But I am digressing, and must hark back to the Admiral, who has stolen on in front of his followers and is now crouching, like an old tiger, a couple of yards from the bank of the brook. Above him, waving to and fro almost like that tiger's tail, is the graceful, gleaming fly-rod, with its long light line, which looks in the summer air no thicker than gossamer threads. In front of the old gentleman's position, and on the other side of the stream, is a crumbling stone wall, and for a foot or two from it, between it and the Admiral, the water glides by in shadow. Had you watched it very carefully, you might, if you were a fisherman, have detected a still, small rise, so small that it hardly looked like a rise at all. Surely none but the most experienced would have guessed that it was the rise of the largest fish in that stream. But the Admiral was 'very experienced,' and knew almost how many spots there were on the deep, broad sides of the four-pounder whose luncheon of tiny half-drowned duns was disturbing the waters opposite. At last the fly was dry enough to please him, and Admiral Chris let it go. A score of times



THE ADMIRAL FISHING



before, in the last few days, he had had just as good a chance of beguiling his victim, and each time his cast had been light and true, so that the harshest of critics or most jealous of rivals (the same thing, you know) could have found no fault in it. Each time the fly, dry as a bone and light as thistle-down, had lit upon the stream just the right distance above the feeding fish, and had sailed over him with jaunty wings well cocked, so close an imitation of nature that the man who made it could hardly have picked it out from among the dozen live flies which sailed by with it. But a man's eyes are no match for a fish's, and the old 'sock dollager' had noticed something wrong—a shade of colour, a minute mistake in form, or something too delicate even for Ogden's fingers to set right—and had forthwith declined to be tempted. But this time fate was against the gallant fish. The Admiral had miscalculated his cast, and the little dun hit hard against the crumbling wall and tumbled back from it into the water 'anyhow.'

Though a mistake, it was the most deadly cast the Admiral could have made. A score of flies had fallen in the same helpless fashion from that wall in the last half-hour, and as each fell the great fish had risen and sucked them down. This fell right into his mouth. He saw no gleam of gut in the treacherous shadow, he had seen no upright figure on the bank for an hour and a half; he had no time to scrutinise the fly as it sailed down to him, so he turned like a thought in a quick brain, caught the fly, and knew that he too was caught, almost before the Admiral had had time to realise that he had for once made a bad

cast. And then the struggle began ; and such is the injustice of man's nature that even gentle Mrs. Winthrop did not feel a touch of compassion for that gallant little trout, battling for his life against a man who weighed fifteen stone to his four pounds, and had had as many years to learn wisdom in, almost, as the fish had lived weeks. No doubt she would have felt sorry for the fish if she had thought of these things, but then you see she didn't think of them.

'By George ! I'm into him,' shouted the Admiral.

Anyone only slightly acquainted with our sporting idioms might have taken this speech literally, and wondered how such a very small whale could have held such a very large Jonah. But the Admiral never stopped to pick his words when excited, as poor Billy soon discovered. An evil fate had prompted Billy to snatch up the net as soon as his uncle struck his fish, and now, as the four-pounder darted down stream, the boy made a dab at him with it.

'Ah, you young owl ! You lubberly young sea-cook,' roared the infuriated old gentleman. 'What are you doing ? Do you think you're going to take a trout like a spoonful of porridge ? Get below him, and wait till I steer him into the net.'

Frightened by Towzer's futile 'dab,' the trout had made a desperate dash for the further side of the stream, making the Admiral's reel screech as the line ran out. Skilfully the old man humoured his victim, now giving him line, now just balking him in his efforts to reach a weed-bed or a dangerous-looking root. People talk of salmon which have taken a day to kill ; it is a good trout which gives the angler ten

minutes' 'play.' The Admiral's trout was tired even in less time than that, and came slowly swimming down past a small island of water weeds, beyond the deep water on the house-side of the stream, submissive now to his captor's guiding hand. Gently the Admiral drew him towards the shallows, and in another moment he would have been in the net, when suddenly, without warning, he gave his head one vicious shake, and, leaping clear out of the water, fell back upon the little island, where he lay high and dry, the red spots on his side gleaming in the sun. It was his last effort for freedom, and now, as he lay gasping within a few inches of the clear stream, of home and safety, the treacherous steel thing dropped out of his mouth, the current caught the belly of the loose line and floated it down stream, and the Admiral stood on the further bank dumb with disgust, the last link broken which bound his fish to him. In a moment more the fish would recover from his fall, and then one kick, however feeble, would be enough to roll him back into the Tane, and so good-bye to all the fruits of several weeks' patience and cunning, and good-bye, too, to all chance of catching 'the best trout, by George, sir, in the brook !' It was hard !

But there was another chance in the Admiral's faveur which he had not counted upon. Even as the fish fell back upon the dry weeds Snap slid quietly as an otter into the stream. A few strong, silent strokes, and he was alongside the weeds, and as the fish's gaping gills opened before he made what would have been to the Admiral a fatal effort Snap's fingers were inscrted, and the great trout carried off through his

own element as unceremoniously as if it really was an otter which had got him.

'I'm not a bad retriever, sir, am I?' asked the boy as he laid his prize down at old Winthrop's feet. That worthy sportsman was delighted.

'No, my boy,' he replied, 'you are first-rate, though perhaps Mr. Hales would call you a sad dog if he saw you in those dripping garments. Be off and change into some of Frank's toggery.'

'All right, sir; come on, Frank,' replied Snap, and together the three boys raced off to their own domain in one of the wings of Fairbury Court, given over long ago to boys, dogs, and disorder.

Meanwhile the Admiral retired to weigh his fish, which he did most carefully, allowing three ounces for its loss of weight since landing—an altogether unnecessary concession, as it had not been out of the water then more than five minutes. However, he entered it in his fishing journal as 3 lbs. 11 ozs., caught August 2, and retrieved by Snap Hales. As he closed the book he sighed and muttered, 'That is about the last trout I shall take on the Tane.'

CHAPTER VI

THE BLOW FALLS

THE day after the Admiral's triumph over his fishy tenant he and his sister called a meeting in the morning-room after breakfast. It was an informal meeting, but, as he said that the business to be done was important, the young squire restrained his impatience to go and see the men about rolling the cricket pitch in the park, and waited to hear what his uncle had to say.

'I'm sorry, Frank,' the old man said, 'that you will have to put off "the Magpies" for next week, but I am afraid we can't have any cricket here this August.'

'Why, uncle,' expostulated Frank, 'it is the very best fun we have, and the Magpies are capital good fellows as well as good cricketers.'

'Yes, I know,' replied his uncle gravely, 'but even cricket must give way sometimes, and now it happens that your mother and I are suddenly called away on business, on very important business,' and here he looked sternly at his sister-in-law, who turned her face from the light, and appeared to busy herself with the arrangement of a vase of flowers on the old oak over-mantel.

'But, uncle,' put in Towzer, 'couldn't Frank take care of the Magpies even if you and mother were not here? Of course it would not be half such fun as if you were here to score and Mother to look on, but Humphreys (the butler) would see that the dinners were all right. I'm sure he could,' added the boy more confidently, catching at a sign of approval in his brother's face.

'It wouldn't do, my boy,' asserted Admiral Chris, 'it would not do at all; it would be rude to your guests, you wouldn't be able to manage, and besides,' he added, as if in despair for a convincing argument, 'we might be able to get back, and then neither your mother nor I need miss the match.'

This was quite another story, and so the boys consented, albeit with a very bad grace, to postpone their cricket.

'What I propose now instead of the match,' continued the Admiral, 'is a little travel for you two, and I've asked Snap Hales's uncle to let him go with you. I want you to go off and try a fishing tour in Wales, whilst your mother and I finish our business in London, and then we'll all meet again in a fortnight's time.'

'Bravo, uncle!' cried Frank, 'but what am I to do for a rod?'

'Oh, if yours is broken you had better take mine,' replied the Admiral.

'What, your big Castle Connel? Thank you, sir; it would be as much good to me in such cramped places as you used to tell us about as a clothes-prop!' replied Frank.

'No, not the Castle Connel, the Ogden; I shan't want it, and you will take care of it, I know,' was the unexpected reply.

'Your Ogden, sir!' said Frank; 'why, I thought no one might look at it from less than ten paces.'

'You're an impudent young monkey, Frank,' laughed the Admiral, 'but still you may have it.'

And so it was settled that the Magpie match should be given up, and Frank and Billy be packed off on a fishing tour in Wales, whilst their mother and the Admiral went up to town and transacted the troublesome business which had had the bad taste to demand their attention during the Midsummer holidays.

A little later in the day a man came up from the village with a note from Mr. Hales for the Admiral. The boys did not see it, but it was understood to contain his consent in writing 'to the proposal that Snap should join the expedition.' For the rest of that day all was excitement and bustling preparations for a start. It seemed almost as if they were preparing for something much more important than a fortnight's trip into Wales. Snap was up at the house all day. That with him was common enough. His own packing had not taken him long. The boy was keener-eyed than his young companions, and, in spite of an apparent roughness, was more sensitive to external influences than either of them. Hence it was perhaps that he noticed what they overlooked; noticed that Mrs. Winthrop's eyes followed her sons about from room to room, that she seemed to dread to lose them from her sight, that the dinner that night was what

the boys called a birthday dinner, that is, consisted of all the little dishes of which Mrs. Winthrop knew each boy was specially fond, and what struck him more than anything was that two or three times he was sure her eyes filled with tears at some chance remark of Frank's or Willy's which to him had no sad meaning in it. He was puzzled, and, worse than that, 'depressed.'

The start next morning was even less auspicious than 'packing-day' had been. The midsummer weather seemed to have gone, and the gables of the old house showed through a grey and rainy sky; rain knocked the leaves off the roses, and battered angrily at the window-panes. The pretty Tane was swollen and mud-coloured, and, altogether, leaving home on a fishing trip to Wales felt worse than leaving home the first time for school.

The Admiral had determined on seeing them on their way as far as the county town, and drove to the station with them in the morning. If it had not been so absolutely absurd, Snap would have fancied once or twice that the old gentleman did not like any of the boys to be alone with his neighbours, or even with the servants. It would have been very unlike him if it had been the case, so of course Snap was mistaken.

'Towzer,' asked Frank in a whisper as they drove away, 'what was the Mater crying about?'

The Admiral overheard him, and replied :

'Crying, what nonsense, Frank; your mother was waving good-bye and good riddance to you with that foolish scrap of lace of hers; that's all. Crying,

indeed!' and the old seaman snorted indignantly at the idea.

It was all very well for the Admiral to deny the fact, and to go very near to getting angry about it, but Snap at any rate knew that it was a fact, and that Admiral Chris knew it too. It was the first untruth he had ever heard from the upright old gentleman by his side, and Snap's wonder and dislike to this journey grew. As Snap looked back a turn in the road gave him another rain-blurred glimpse of Fairbury, with a little drooping figure which still watched from the Hall steps, and a conviction that something was wrong somewhere forced itself insensibly upon him, though as yet he was not wise enough to guess where the evil threatened.

The rain had an angry sound in it, unlike the merry splash of heavy summer showers : there seemed a sorrow in the sigh of the wind, unlike the scent-laden sigh of summer breezes after rain. Nature looked ugly and unhappy, and the boys were soon glad to curl themselves up in their respective corners of the railway carriage, with their backs resolutely turned upon the rain-blurred panes of the carriage window.

At the station the Admiral had met his favourite aversion, Mr. Crombie. What Mr. Crombie had originally done to offend the Admiral no one knew, but he had done it effectually. Crombie gave Admiral Chris the gout even worse than '47 port or the east wind.

Crombie was on the point of addressing Frank when the Admiral intervened and carried off the boys to get tickets. A little to Frank's surprise, his uncle

took third-class tickets, for, although on long journeys the old gentleman invariably practised this wise economy, Frank had been accustomed to hear him say, ‘Always take “firsts” on our own line, to support a local institution.’

As the Admiral took his tickets the voice of his persecutor sounded behind him. Crombie had followed his foe.

‘What!’ he said—and the sneering tone was so marked that it made the boys wince—‘an Admiral travelling third! ’

‘Yes, Sir,’ retorted the Admiral fiercely. ‘God bless me, you don’t mean to say there is a “fourth” on? Only persons who are afraid of being mistaken for their butlers travel first nowadays,’ and with an indignant snort the old gentleman squared his shoulders, poked out his chin, and walked down the platform with a regular quarter-deck roll, leaving Mr. Crombie to meditate on what he was pleased to call ‘the “side” of them beggarly aristocrats.’

At Glowsbury, the county town for Fairbury, Admiral Chris left the boys, hurrying away with an old crony of his, who, in spite of nods and winks, would blurt out, ‘I’m so sorry, Winthrop.’ But the Admiral let him get no further. ‘Good-bye, lads,’ he sang out, and then away he trotted, holding on to his astonished friend, whom he rapidly hustled out of earshot, so that the boys never knew the cause of that old gentleman’s sorrow.

It didn’t trouble them much either, for, once in Wales, the weather grew fine again—provokingly fine, the boys thought. If ever you go to dear little Wales,

C Transatlantic cousin, to see the view, you may bet your bottom dollar that you won't see it. You will be like that other tourist who 'viewed the mist, but missed the view.' If, however, you can jockey the Welsh climate into a belief that you are going there solely for fishing, you may rely on such weather as the Winthrops got, that is to say, clear skies, broiling suns, and tiny silver streams calling out for rain-storms to swell their diminished waters, and crying out in vain. The waters will be clearer than crystal, the fish more shy than a boy of fourteen amongst ladies, and the views perfect. Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to jockey anything Welsh: Wales is very unbelieving, and especially does it disbelieve anglers.

The boys opened their campaign on the Welsh borders, fished successfully for samlets—bright, silvery little fellows, which had to be put back—and with a miserable want of success for the brown trout, which they were allowed to keep if they could catch them. Sometimes they walked from point to point, but then they found that their expenses in gingerbeer were almost as great as if they had spent the money in a third-class ticket; once they tried a long run by rail on the—well, I dare not tell you its real name—so I'll say the Grand Old Dawdler's line. They bought third-class tickets, but travelled first, because the line had only three coaches in at that time, and they were all first. Two rustics travelled with them; it was rather a busy day with the Grand Old Dawdler's line. The station-master at the starting-point, who sold them their tickets, went with them as engine-driver and

guard, and at each of the little stations which they passed he acted as station-master. This system of centralising all the service in one person had its advantages: there is only one person to tip, and if he is sober the travelling, if slow (say seven miles an hour), is very fairly safe.

Once, and once only, they tried tricycles. Wales is not as level as a billiard-table. Towzer, careless of the picturesque, wished that it was. On tricycles, he explained, if you were not used to them, you could travel on the flat rather faster than you could walk; uphill you had to get off and shove, and downhill you were either run away with, or, if you put on the brake, the tricycle stopped, you didn't—on the contrary, you proceeded upon your journey by a series of gyrations through the air, until suddenly planted on your head in the next county but two. Besides all this it cost more to send back your tricycle by rail than a first-class ticket would have cost, whereas if you didn't send it back you were liable to be tried at the next assizes.

A letter which I insert here, and which Mrs. Winthrop still keeps, for the sake, not of its melodious metre, but for the sake of auld lang syne, will give the reader some idea of the Winthrops' fishing adventures. I am inclined to think that Frank wrote it. Big, strong fellow as he was, he had a habit of constantly writing to the Mater, and I happen to know that Snap was too bad-tempered at that time to write anything. He had passed all that morning in trying to cast on a certain wooded reach. He had caught the grass; he had cracked his line like a coach-whip, and lost a score of flies by so doing; and

had at last settled solemnly down to dig up with his penknife a great furze-bush on the bank which appeared to his angry imagination to rise from behind at every fly which he tried to throw.

“Aug. 12, 1874.

‘DEAR MATER,—

‘ Snap Hales arose, from his night’s repose,
 In the midst of the Cambrian mountains,
 Where from cliff and from crag, over peat-moss and
 hag,
 The Tanat shepherds her fountains.

(Observe here the resemblance to Shelley.)

- ‘ He rolled in his tub, and tackled his grub,
 He booted and hatted in haste,
 Then said, “ If you’re wishing, boy Bill, to go fishing,
 There isn’t one moment to waste.”
- ‘ He strode to the brook, and with lordly look
 Quoth, “ Now, little fish, if you’re in,
 Let some grayling or trout just put up his snout
 And swallow this minnow of tin.”
- ‘ As if at his wish, up bounded a fish,
 Gave one dubious sniffle or snuff,
 Thought ‘ It’s covered with paint, I’ll be hooked if it
 ain’t,
 And the fellow who made it’s a muff.”
- ‘ Then Harold had tries with all sorts of flies,
 Which were brilliant, gigantic, and rare,
 But among them were none which resembled a “dun,”
 So the fish were content with a stare.

- ‘ To a tree by that brook many flies took their hook,
Many more were whipped off in the wind ;
One fixed in the nose, several more in the clothes
Of that angler before and behind.
- ‘ Then his cast-line broke, and Harold spoke,
Right wrathful words spoke he,
“ Very well ! you may grin, but I’ll just wade in
Where there’s neither briar nor tree.”
- ‘ With naked foot, without stocking or boot,
Right into the stream he strode—
With a splash and a splutter, with a murmur and a
mutter,
And he frequently “ Ah’d ” and “ Oh’d.”
- ‘ Alas, as he tripped his bare feet slipped,
They slipped on those slimy stones,
And down he came (I forget the name
Of the very identical bones
- ‘ Upon which he sat) ; but he’d flies in his hat,
And as he went down the stream
The fish arose, and tugged at his clothes,
Until he began to scream.
- ‘ Round his hat’s broad brim they began to swim,
And into his face did stare.
His mouth they eyed, they peeped inside,
Much wondering who lived there.
- ‘ Their victim cried, “ In vain I’ve tried
To snare these fishes free.
Alas, for my sin, as they’ve got me in,
I fear they’ll swallow me.”

- ‘But, “Alack, this Jonah’s a fourteen-stoner,”
 ‘Twas thus that the fishes cried.
 “If we gape till we split, there will still be a bit
 Of the monster left outside.”
- ‘So Will landed him safe, our fisherman waif,
 In safety he landed him ;
 With gobble and munch he chawed up his lunch,
 He was hungry after his swim.
- ‘He has sworn he will never again endeavour
 Those innocent fish to hurt,
 For all he can get is thundering wet,
 And any amount of dirt.
- ‘Your truthful
 ‘FRANK.’

After this, perhaps, it is not surprising that the boys voted fishing very poor fun, and took to mountaineering instead. They had climbed Cader Idris (a very pretty climb from its more difficult side) and Snowdon, and were resting at a first-rate hotel not far from Snowdon’s foot, when they found the following letter on their breakfast-table from the Admiral :—

‘DEAR FRANK,—As your mother is not very well, I intend to bring her down to Dolgelly for a few days. Take some nice quiet rooms where we can all be lodged together at less expense than at an hotel.

‘Your affect. uncle,
 ‘CHRISTOPHER WINTHROP.

‘P.S.—I have some important news to give you, and should like you all to be at home when we arrive by the 12.50 train to-morrow.’

Frank read the letter out to the rest at breakfast, and then laid it quietly down by his plate.

'Snap,' he said, 'there is something wrong at home. I can't make out what the Admiral is always harping on economy for. Surely our mother' (and unconsciously there was a tone of pride in that 'our mother') 'can afford to go to any of these wretched little hotels if she likes. I shan't take rooms. It's all nonsense; I'm not going to have her murdered by Welsh cooks, especially if she is ill.'

No one having any explanation of the Admiral's letter to offer, or any objection to staying where they were, the conversation dropped, but the boys were restless and unhappy until the 12.50 train was due in.

When that train pulled up with a jerk at the platform the three had already been waiting for it half an hour, for their impatience had made them early, and long habit had made the train late. As soon as they could find their mother and Admiral Chris the boys pounced upon them, and in the first burst of eager welcome the cloud vanished. But it reappeared again before the party reached the hotel, and the Admiral was as nearly angry as he knew how to be on finding that the rooms taken for himself and sister were, as usual, just the best in the hotel.

The dinner was a poor and spiritless affair, and Snap noticed that the old gentleman, instead of lighting a cigar after leaving the table, took at once to a pipe.

'Why, sir,' remonstrated Snap, 'you are false to your principles for the first time in my experience of

you; I thought that you always told us that the cigar was a necessary appetiser, to be taken before the solid comfort of the evening pipe.'

'Nonsense, my boy, nonsense, I never said that. A cigar is a poor thing at best. Nothing like a pipe for a sailor,' blurted out the Admiral, looking annoyed at Snap's innocent speech, and glancing nervously in Mrs. Winthrop's direction, while over her sweet face a cloud passed as she too noticed for the first time this little change in her brother-in-law's habits.

Coming up to her eldest boy's chair, and leaning caressingly against him, the little mother turned Frank's head towards her, so that she could look down into his honest blue eyes.

'What is it, little mother; do you want a kiss in public? For shame, dear!' laughed Frank.

'Tell me, Frank,' she said, taking no notice of his chaff, 'do you want very much to go to Oxford?'

'Right away, mother? No, thank you. I am doing very well here.'

'But when you leave Fernhall, Frank?'

'Well, yes, mother! You wouldn't have me go to Cambridge, because, you see, all my own friends are at the Nose,' replied Frank.

'The Nose?' asked Mrs. Winthrop, looking puzzled.

'Brazen Nose, dear, Brazen Nose!—the college, you know, at which Dick and the Rector's son now are.'

'But what should you say, Frank, if you could not go either to Oxford or Cambridge?' persisted his mother.

'Conundrum, mother. I give it up,' answered the boy lazily; 'call me early, dear, to-morrow, and ask me an easier one.'

Poor little lady, the tears came into her eyes as the smile grew in his, and at last Frank saw it. Jumping up and putting his arm round her, he asked :

'Why, mother dear, what is it? I was joking. I'll go anywhere you want.'

'Yes, my boy, I know,' sobbed the little woman, 'but you can't go either to Oxford or Cambridge. There, Chris, tell them the rest,' and, slipping out of Frank's arms, she left the room.

After this beginning the whole story was soon told. The Admiral's pipe had gone out, his collar seemed to be choking him, but, now that he was fairly cornered, he didn't flinch any longer.

'Yes!' he said, 'that is about the truth of it. We are all ruined. Fairbury was sold three days after you left it. That is why we sent you down here. We wanted to spare Frank the wrench, and we didn't want any of you punching the auctioneer's head, or any nonsense of that sort. We have all got to work now, lads, for our living.'

Here the old man rose and put his strong hands on Frank's shoulders, and looked him full in the face.

'With God with them, my boys aren't afraid, are they?'

Frank gripped the old man's hand, and Billy crept up close to him, while Snap, watching from a distance, felt hurt to the heart that he had not lost and was not privileged to suffer with them.

And yet 'Fairbury sold' seemed too much for any of them to realise all at once. Fairbury seemed part and parcel of themselves. It was to them as its shell to an oyster. The Winthrops (the whole race) had been born in it, and it had grown as they grew. After a while Towzer broke the silence.

'Then, uncle, where are we going home to? he asked.

'Home, my lad! Well, I suppose we must make a new home somewhere. It should not be difficult at *our* age, should it, Frank?' added the gallant old man, as if he were the youngest of the young as well as the bravest of the brave.

'But, uncle, won't mother's tenants pay their rent?' asked Frank.

'My boy, your mother has no tenants,' said Mrs. Winthrop, who had re-entered the room, 'and you'll never be Squire of Fairbury, as you should have been. It does seem hard.'

And so it did, and one young heart, of no kin to hers, felt it almost as much as she did, and Snap swore then, though it seemed a ludicrous thing even to himself, that, if ever he could, he would put back that sweet woman and her boy in their own old home.

But I must hurry over this part of my story. Sorrow and tears are only valuable for the effects they leave behind. Without the rain there would be no corn; without misfortune and poverty there would be very little effort and achievement in the world. But it is more pleasant to dwell on the happy results than on the causes.

When Frank had insisted on seeing his mother to her bedroom, with a quaint assumption of authority which she never resisted, the Admiral explained how all their troubles had arisen. A friend to whom Mrs. Winthrop had lent 500*l.* had repaid that sum to her agent in Scotland. The agent (a lawyer), acting on the Admiral's instructions with regard to small sums paid in the absence of Mrs. Winthrop on the Continent, had invested the 500*l.* in some bank shares. The shares were bought, he believed, much under their value. Alas, the public knew better than that lawyer. The bank was an unlimited affair, and broke soon after he had bought its shares, and Mrs. Winthrop became responsible for the payment of its debts to the last penny which she possessed. Without any fault of theirs, without warning, the Winthrops had to give up their all. This is one of the dangers of civilised life, and, unfortunately, company promoters, swindling bankers, and such like are not yet allowed to hang for their sins.

Luckily, the Admiral was not involved in the general ruin, and was as staunch and true as his kind generally are in the time of trouble. 'My dear,' he had said to his sister, when he had finished abusing the bank, the bankers, the Government, and every person or thing directly or indirectly connected with banking, 'it was my fault for not looking after the money myself. Nonsense ! of course it was. What should a poor devil of a lawyer know about banking, or law, or anything except bills ? However,' he added more calmly, 'there is my little property and pension for you and the boys, and, as for me, I dare say that I

can get a secretaryship to a club or something of that sort in town.'

The Admiral had a hazy idea that the letters R.N. behind his name were sufficient qualification and testimonial for any public office, from the directorship of a guinea-pig company to the secretaryship of the Royal Geographical Society.

'And now, lads,' he was saying an hour after Mrs. Winthrop had retired for the night, 'think it all well over. There is a stool in an office for one of you, if you like. No place like the City for making money in; or, if you don't like that, Frank, we can find money enough somehow to send you to the Bar. We have employed attorneys enough in our time, and of course some of them would send you briefs enough to give you a start' (would they? poor Admiral!); 'or there is young Sumner's craze—cattle-ranching or farming in the far West—a rough life, no doubt, but—— Ah, well, it's not for me to choose. I'm not beginning life. I wish I was—as a cowboy,' and the old man picked up his candle and trotted off to bed with almost enough fire in voice and eye to persuade you that he was still young enough to begin another round with Fate.

That night the boys sat up on the edges of their beds until long after midnight, talking things over. Frank was very grave, and inclined to persuade his younger brother to take to the office-stool.

'And you, Major?' asked Towzer; 'are you going to the Bar?'

'Well, no,' replied his brother, 'I don't think that I could stand being buried alive in those dim, musty

chambers yet, and I've no ambition to conquer Fortune with the jawbone of an ass.'

'Very well, then, if you won't set me an example, let's drop London and talk cattle-ranching,' said Towzer. 'Snap, you've got an old "Field" in your bag, haven't you ?'

'Yes, here you are,' replied the person addressed, producing an old copy of that *one* good paper from his portmanteau.

'Look in the advertisement-sheet,' suggested Frank, 'there is always something about ranching there.'

" "Expedition to Spitzbergen,"' read Snap ; 'that won't do. "Wanted another gun to join a party going to the Zambesi." Ah, here you are, "Employment for gentlemen's sons. The advertiser, who has been settled at Oxloops, on the north fork of the Stinking Water, for the last ten years, is prepared to receive two or more sons of gentlemen upon his ranche, and instruct them in the practical part of this most lucrative business, a business in which from 35 to 50 per cent. can easily be made, whilst leading that open-air, sportsmanlike life so dear to English country gentlemen. All home comforts found, and instruction given by the advertiser in person. Premium, 200*l.*'''

'There !' cried Towzer, 'what do you think of that ? The 200*l.* will be part of the start in life which Uncle talked about, and after the first year we can just buy cattle and start for ourselves. You'll come, of course, Snap ?'

'Well, I don't know,' replied Snap ; 'I've not got the 200*l.* in the first place, and in the second place, if

cattle-ranching pays so well, I don't see why this cattle-king wants to bother himself with pupils for a paltry 200*l.* a year; besides, I fancy Sumner said that you could learn more as a cowboy than as a pupil, and the cowboy is paid, while the pupil pays for learning. I'll come if you go, but not as a pupil.'

'I half suspect that Snap is right, Billy,' said Frank; 'but, anyhow, we must talk this over with the Admiral.'

'Very well,' assented that young enthusiast; 'but I say, Major, wouldn't it be jolly if it was true? Fifty per cent., he says. Well, suppose the mother could start us with 1,000*l.* apiece, that would be 1,000*l.* profit between us the first year. Of course we would not spend any of it. Clothes last for ever out there, and food costs nothing. By adding what we made to our capital we could make a fortune and buy back Fairbury in no time.'

'Steady there, young 'un; optimism is a good horse, but you are riding his tail off at the start, and I expect that cattle-ranching wants almost as much work and patience as other things,' replied his more sober brother.

But Billy's enthusiasm had won the day in spite of reason, and they all turned in to dream of life in the Far West, and easily won fortunes.

Only one of them lay awake for long that night, watching the clouds drift across the mountain, and, if anyone had put his ear very close to Snap's pillow, he might have heard him mutter, as he tossed in his first restless slumbers, 'Poor little mother! it has

almost broken her heart. If we could only win it back ! If we could only win it back !'

And yet Snap was no kith or kin of the Winthrops, Fairbury was no home of his, nor the gentle lady of whom he dreamed his mother.

CHAPTER VII

LEAVE LIVERPOOL

THIS tale is written for boys, and if the writer knows anything at all about them they like sunshine as much as he does. That being so, we will skip, if you please, a certain foggy morning in Liverpool, when the heavy sky over the Mersey seemed as full of gloom and rain as men's eyes of tears and sorrow. The great lump in the old Admiral's throat kept getting up into his mouth in a most confusing way, and required a good many glasses of something which he never drank to keep it down. Poor Mrs. Winthrop, strong in a woman's courage to bear suffering, seemed to be thinking for everyone. There was no tear of her shedding on her son's cheek, and her pretty lips were firm if they were white. 'Don't forget, boys, your father's last written words—'Bring up my boys as Christians and gentlemen,' he wrote. You're out of my keeping now, but, whatever your work, remember you are Winthrops.'

And then the last signal to those aboard sounded, and those who had only come to say 'good-bye' hurried off the ship. A party of schoolboys who had come to see a chum leave for the great North-West struck up 'For he's a jolly good fellow' as the steamer

left her moorings, and, carried off their balance by the heartiness of the chorus, the Admiral himself and everyone not absolutely buried in pocket-handkerchiefs took up the refrain. The last the boys could remember of England was that busy, dirty pier, a crowd waving adieu, and the dear faces of mother and uncle with a smile on them, in which hope and love had for the moment got the better of sorrow.

And then they were out on the broad bosom of old Ocean, with limitless stretches of green waves all round, and all life in front of them. As the ship sped on, the air seemed to grow clearer and more buoyant, the possibilities of the future greater, and success a certainty. Everyone on board seemed full of feverish energy. If they talked of speculations or business they talked in millions, not in sober hundreds, and before they were half across the Atlantic the boys were beginning to almost despise those who stayed behind in slow and sober England—all except Snap, at least, who annoyed them all by his oft-repeated argument, ‘If it is so good over there, why do any of these fellows come back?’

The voyage itself was an uneventful one; that is to say, no one fell overboard, no shipwreck occurred, and, thanks to the daily cricket match with a ball of twine attached to fifty yards of string, the Atlantic was crossed almost before our friends had time to realise that they had left England.

On landing, the two Winthrops had to make their way to the ranche of a Mr. Jonathan Brown in Kansas County, to whom the Admiral had sent something like 300*l.* as premium for the two boys. For this they



' GOOD-BYE '

were promised ‘all home comforts, and a thoroughly practical education in cattle-ranching and mixed farming, together with the benefit of Mr. Brown’s experience in purchasing a small place for themselves at the end of their educational period.’ Snap, not having money to waste, or faith in ‘ranching and mixed farming,’ was to proceed further west and try to find employment along the new line until he could obtain day labourer’s work on a ranche. The Admiral had insisted on paying the railway fare for the three of them, and, contrary to his custom, had paid first-class fare, arguing that thus they might possibly make a useful friend on the way, and at any rate sleep soft and warm until the moment came for the final plunge.

So the boys entered upon their first overland stage together, gazing with big eyes of wonder at the fairy land which seemed to slip so noiselessly past their carriage windows. It was almost as if the dry land had taken the characteristics of the ocean, all was so big, so boundless, around them. First there seemed to come a belt of great timber near the sea ; then they passed through that and came into an ocean of yellow corn, of which from the windows of the train they could not see the shore. Most of the time the lads sat in the smoking-car, not because they smoked, but because the smokers were friendly and told such marvellous yarns and amused them.

On the third day there was an addition to the little party in the smoking-saloon, a very ‘high-toned’ person in a chimney-pot hat and gloves. This gentleman was a great talker, and, having tried in vain to

get up an argument on the merits of some politician, whom he called a 'leather-head' and a 'log-roller,' with the big-bearded man or his two hard-bitten companions, who until then had shared the room with the boys, the new-comer expectorated politely on either side of Snap's feet, evidently enjoying the boy's look of annoyance, and then opened fire on him thus :

' Say ! I guess you're a Britisher now, ain't you ? '

' I am, sir,' answered Snap with a good-tempered smile.

' Getting pretty well starved out over there, I reckon, by this time ? '

' Well, no ! we haven't had to take to tobacco-chewing to stop our hunger, yet,' replied Snap, with a wink at Winthrop.

' Wal,' retorted the Yankee, ' you look mighty lean, fix it how you will. If it's all so bully in England, why do you come over here ? ' This the Yankee seemed to think a clincher, but Snap was ready for him.

' Well, you see, sir, we are only following the examples of our forefathers, who came over and made America, and founded the race you are so justly proud of.'

' Founded the race ! fiddlesticks ! The American race, sir, just grew out of the illimitable prairie, started, maybe, by a few of the best of every nation, but with a character of its own, and I guess the whole universe knows now that our Republic can lick creation, as it licked you Britishers in 1781. Perhaps you'll tell me we didn't do that ? '

By this time the other occupants of the carriage

were all watching Snap Hales and the top-hatted one, a curled and smooth-looking fellow ('oily,' perhaps, would describe him better than smooth) of thirty or so. The Yankee cattle-men were looking on with a grin at seeing the English boy's 'leg pulled' as they called it—the other two English boys in blank amazement at the quiet good-temper of fiery Snap Hales, under an ordeal of chaff from a perfect stranger. Could it be that the sight of that ugly little revolver, which the stranger had exhibited more than once, had cowed their chum already? Whatever the reason, Snap's unexpected answer came in his sweetest tones.

'Oh no, I'll not deny that; it's historical, and, besides, it served us right. We didn't recognise that a big son we ought to have been proud of had grown up.'

'Oh, then, you'll allow we licked you at Sarytogy and Yorktown?'

'Yes, certainly.'

'And perhaps you'll allow that if you tried it on again we'd lick you again?' persisted poor Snap's enemy, whilst the glance Snap gave Frank could hardly keep that indignant Briton quiet on his seat.

'Yes, I'll allow that too, if we came to invade your big country at home with a mere handful of men of the same breed from over the seas.'

Somehow, Snap's quiet way was rousing the American's temper, and he retorted hotly: 'That's the way you talk, is it; and I tell you, and you'll have to allow, that, man to man, an American citizen can always whip a blooming Britisher.'

Snap gave an actual sigh of relief, or so it seemed to the boys, and his eyes lit up with a glad light, that those who know the breed don't always like to see. He had done his duty ; had kept his temper as long as he could be expected to ; and now he might fairly follow his natural instincts. Still quite cool, although his knees were almost knocking together with eagerness, which others might have mistaken for funk, the boy took up the challenge.

'Are you a good specimen, sir, of an American citizen ?' The man looked puzzled, but replied, unabashed :

'Wal, as citizens come, I guess I'm a pretty average sample.'

'I'm sorry for that, sir,' answered Snap, 'as I'm only a very poor specimen of those Britishers of whom you speak so politely ; but I'll tell you what I'll do. I never fired a revolver in my life, but you said just now that Heenan had whipped all England with his fists, and America could lick the old country at that as she can at everything else. Well ! we stop at Bismarck for twenty minutes soon, I sce. It isn't time for lunch yet, so, if you'll give your revolver to that gentleman to hold, I'll fight you five rounds, if I can last as long, and these gentlemen shall see fair play. Only, if you lick me, mind I am not a typical Britisher.'

The American looked from one to another in an uncomfortable, hesitating way, and then at the long, slight, boyish figure before him. He had gone too far to draw back—he was three stone heavier than his young adversary—so with a blasphemous oath he

handed the derringer to his bearded fellow-countryman, adding :

‘It don’t seem hardly fair, but, if you will have the starch taken out of you, you shall.’

As the pistol-holder left the smoking-room to put the property with which he had been entrusted into his valise he gave Frank Winthrop a sign to follow him. When he and the boy were alone he turned quietly round and said :

‘Can your pal fight?’

‘Like a demon,’ answered Frank; ‘he was nearly cock of our school, young as he was.’

‘All right, then, I’ll not interfere. He is a good plucked one, but tell him to keep out of the man’s reach for the first round or two. I don’t suppose he has much science, but one blow from a man so much bigger would about finish your friend.’

‘I don’t believe it,’ answered Frank hotly; but the kindly cattle-man only smiled, and, putting his hand on the boy’s shoulder, led him back into the smoking-car.

In another ten minutes the warning-bell on the engine began to toll, and the train ran through a street of rough wooden shanties and pulled up just outside the ‘city’ (a score of houses sometimes make a city out west), by a little prairie lake. In such a city as Bismarck, in the early days of which I am speaking, even half a dozen pistol shots would not have attracted a policeman, principally because no policemen existed. Sometimes a scoundrel became too daring in his villainies even for such tolerant people as the citizens of Bismarck. When this

happened someone shot him, though probably he shot several other people first. At the back of the little group of shanties there used to be a long row of palings about eight feet high. ‘Hangman’s palings’ they called these, because upon them, for want of trees, the first vigilance committee had nine months previously (the ‘city’ was only fifteen months old) hanged its first batch of victims to the necessities of civilised law and order. In such a city as this a quiet spar would cause no sensation, and certainly would not be interrupted, so Snap quickly stripped, as if he was behind the old School chapel, and Mr. Rufus R. Hackett, his opponent, did the same. Stripped of gloves and hat, Hackett looked less at his ease than his young enemy, and would probably be still waiting to begin if the boy had not stepped in and caught him on the point of the nose with a really straight left-hander.

Now, the writer of this story has been hit very frequently upon the nose. After years and years of practice the sensation is still annoying in the extreme. Your eyes fill with water as if you had inadvertently bolted the mustard-pot ; the constellations of heaven are seen with alarming clearness ; and if you are one of the right sort you come back after that blow like a racquet-ball from the walls of the court. If this is the effect on a nose inured to the rough usage of five-and-twenty years, what must you expect from the owner of a delicately tip-tilted organ, which had been held all its life high above the brutalities of a vulgar world ?

Like a wounded buffalo, with his head down and

blind with rage, the Yankee went for Snap, and, in spite of a well-meant upper cut from that youngster, managed to close with him, and by sheer weight bore him to the ground. There Snap was helpless, and before the big cattle-man could interfere the boy had a couple of lumps on his face, which bore witness to the good-will with which Mr. Hackett had used his beringed fists. But for Snap himself, Mr. Rufus R. H. would there and then have received a sound hiding from the cattle-man, but, though somewhat unsteady on his feet, Snap pleaded that he might have his man left to himself.

Again Hackett tried the rushing game, this time only to meet the boy's left and then blunder over his own legs on to his nose. As the fight went on, Snap recovered from his heavy punishment. Quick as a cat on his feet, he never again let the big man close with him. Every time he stirred to strike, Snap's left hand went out like an arrow from the bow, true to its mark, on one or other of Hackett's eyes. Not once did the boy use his right—that quick-countering left was all that seemed necessary; and, though the American was more game than his appearance would have led his friends to believe, it was evident before the end of the third round that he was at the boy's mercy. From that moment Snap held his hand, simply taking care of himself and getting out of his enemy's way, and carefully abstaining from administering that brutal *coup de grâce* which a less generous nature would have inflicted.

'Say, mate,' quoth one of the cowboys who was Hackett's second, 'it's not much use foolin' around

here, is it? You can't see the Britisher, and he don't seem to cotton to hitting a blind man. Let's have a drink and be friends.'

Almost before he could answer, Snap had the fellow by the hand with a hearty English grip.

'You'll allow we're the same breed now, Mr. Hackett, won't you?' he said. 'It wasn't really a fair fight, you know, because I've learnt boxing, and you haven't.'

In spite of a bumptiousness which acts on a Britisher like a gadfly on a horse, your real American is a right good fellow at bottom; and for the rest of the two days during which Hackett and Snap travelled together nothing could exceed the kindness of the beaten man and his fellow-countrymen to the three English lads.

'He isn't much account,' apologised one of the cattle-men, 'just a school-teaching dude from the Eastern States, I reckon; but you mustn't bear him any malice for hitting you when you were down; there ain't any Queensberry rules out here in a row, and it's no good appealing to the referee on a Western prairie.'

Snap had no intention of bearing malice, nor, indeed, of fighting any more fights, either according to Queensberry rules or the rough-and-tumble rules of the prairie, if he could avoid it, though this one fight was for him an exceedingly lucky event.

Soon after leaving the scene of his encounter the train pulled up at Wapiti, and was met by a man in the roughest of clothes, driving the rudest of carts. He had come for the 'farm pups' from England, he

said, and if they weren't blamed quick with their luggage he was not going to wait for them. An offhand sort of person, thought Snap, but, no doubt, when his master, Mr. Jonathan Brown, is near, he will be a good deal more civil. It was not until months later that Snap learnt that this dirty rough, a common farm-labourer in all but his ignorance of farming, was Mr. Jonathan Brown, 'professor of ranching and mixed farming in all its branches.'

When Frank and Towzer had vanished out of sight Snap turned from the window with a sigh, and found the good-natured eyes of the bearded cattle-man fixed inquiringly upon him.

'So you are not going to learn farming, my lad?' he inquired.

'Not with my friends, I can't afford it,' answered Snap.

'Don't think me rude, but what *are* you going to do?'

'Try to get work at Looloo, on the line, until I can find out how to get paid work as a cowboy up country.'

'Have you any money to keep you from starving till you get work?' asked the American.

'A little; but I mean to earn my food from the start if I can.'

'Well, you've the right sort of grit, my lad,' replied the cattle-man, 'and you're 200*l.* richer than your friends now, poor as you are, for they have thrown their premium clean away. Look here, my name is Nares, and I own the Rosebud ranche in Idaho. I like the look of you, lad, and I'll give you

labourer's wages if you can earn them, and grub anyway, if you like to try.'

'Like to try?' of course Snap liked to try. It was just a fortune to him, and he said so.

'But,' added his friend, 'when you write home tell your friends not to fool away premiums, but to give a lad enough to live on for the first six months, whilst he is looking for work. You would, maybe, have got nothing to do at Looloo for long enough.'

CHAPTER VIII

THE MANIAC

WINTER is not, perhaps, the best time to introduce a boy to the Far West, fresh from all the cosy comforts of home—at least, if he is a boy of the ‘cotton wool’ kind. To a boy like Snap the keen air was worth a king’s ransom; the forests of snow-laden pines through which the train passed were full of mystery and romance; his eyes ached at night from straining to catch a glimpse of some great beast of the forest amongst their tall stems, or at least a track on the pure snow.

The day upon which Frank and Towzer left him was too full of incident for him to find much time to sorrow after his old friends. The train was passing through a district in which great lakes—unfrozen as yet, except just at the edges—lay amongst scattered rocks and pine forests bent and twisted by the Arctic cold and fierce storms of former winters. Inside the cars all was warmth and comfort, although the gaiety of the travellers was sobered down by the presence amongst them of a poor fellow who had lost his wife and two children in a railway accident a week before this. He was now returning from the rough funeral which had been accorded to them at the station of

Boisfort. A strong, gaunt man, his days had been spent as a Hudson Bay runner, and later on as a watcher upon the railway, or manager of Chinese labour. In spite of his harsh training, even his strong nature had succumbed temporarily to the blow from which he was now suffering. His lost family seemed ever before his strained, wild eyes, and the throbbing and rattle of the engine and its cars seemed to beat into his brain and madden him. From time to time he would spring to his feet, clap his hands wildly to his head, and peer out into the snow. Then, moaning, ‘No, it’s not them, it’s not them,’ he would sink down again into his seat, limp and lifeless. Snap had been watching the man, fearing he was going mad, until his friend Nares touched him and said, ‘Don’t keep your eyes on the poor chap like that, maybe it fidgets him.’

Ashamed of what he at once considered an unintentional rudeness on his part, Snap withdrew into another corner of the compartment, and had just wandered off into day-dreams, in which Fairbury and ‘the little mother’ took a prominent place, when he was recalled to himself by a scream and a shuddering exclamation of horror which seemed to pass all along the compartment. Looking up quickly, he had just time to see a wild figure, hatless and grey-haired, hurl itself from the footboard at the end of the cars into the snow, and to hear a wild cry, ‘I am coming, chicks, I am coming.’ In spite of air-brakes and patent communicators it was some minutes before the train could be brought up all standing, and the passengers who hurried out to see after the unfortunate

suicide had a good many hundred yards to go before they reached the spot at which he threw himself from the train, and when they reached the spot an expression of wonder spread over every face. Although the embankment upon which he alighted was considerably below the level of the train, although the train was travelling at express speed for an American line, there was no dead man to pick up from the snow, no man even with fractured limbs or strained sinews, but just the mark of a falling body, and then the tracks of a running man leading straight away through the silent snows to the lake-edge.

Close to the point at which the man had sprung from the train was a labourer's shanty, just one of those rough wooden structures which the Irish out West set up alongside their labours on the line. Round this, when Snap and Nares came up, was gathered an excited little group of passengers and railway-men.

'Are you sure Madge isn't in the house?' someone asked of a little boy of seven, the Irishman's child.

'No, Madgy ain't in the house; I heerd her hollerin' just when the engine went by; hollerin' as if someone had hurted her badly,' the child added.

'Where's your father, little man?' asked Nares, pushing his way to the front.

'Down the line at the bridge, working; father won't be back till night, and mother's gone this hour or more to take him his dinner.'

Nares turned to the men round him, and, speaking in low, quick tones, said:

'We must follow that poor devil; he is stark mad,

and heaven only knows what he will do with the child.'

'With the child ! why, you don't mean to say he has got the child ?' cried one.

Nares was busy arranging something with the guard and didn't answer, but it was evident that the men agreed with him, and were prepared to obey him.

'Then you'll hand over Mr. Hales to Wharton, my stockman at Rosebud,' Nares said to the guard, 'and tell him to leave a horse at the station shanty for me. I'll be in, most likely, to-morrow.'

'You know this labourer is a relation of Wharton's, boss ?' asked one of the railway men.

'No ! is he ?' was the reply.

'Yes, a nephew, they tell me, or something of that sort. Wharton will be wanting to come and help you, I guess.'

'Well, then, I'll tell you what to do. Don't say anything to my man. Mr. Hales can stay here at the cottage until I come back, and we'll come on together to-morrow. Good-bye.'

The guard shook hands, the crowd moved back to the train, the bell tolled as the cars began to move off, and in another minute Snap and Nares were left with one labourer, named Bromley (who had volunteered to help Nares) ; a solitary little group, with a crying child and an empty hut as the only signs of life around them, except for those ominous tracks leading away into the silence and the snow.

After some demur it was determined that Snap should be one of the search-party, and that a message should be left with the boy for his father, telling him

to follow on Nares' track as fast as possible with food and blankets.

This done, the three started at a swinging trot; first Nares, then Bromley, following the man's tracks, and making the road easier for the boy jogging along in the rear. From the moment of starting the silence of the forest seemed to settle down upon the three. No one spoke; no bird whistled; the bushes stood stiff and frozen; no animal rustled through them; all the little brooks were jagged with frost; the only sound was the regular crunch, crunch of the snow beneath their feet, and the laboured breathing of Bromley, who, though willing enough, was not such a 'stayer' as either Nares or Hales. It was late when the child was stolen, and they had already been some two hours on the trail. The tracks still led steadily on towards the Thompson River, the day was fast darkening and Bromley 'beat.' Nares called a halt and proposed that they should stop where they were until Wharton came up with food and blankets, and then (prepared with these necessities) follow the madman by starlight.

Just as they were discussing this course of action a rustling in the bush ahead drew Snap's attention. 'There he goes, there he goes,' cried the boy, dashing forward, as with a crash a tall grey form with something in its arms rushed through the forest on the other side of a broad dell by which the party were sitting. If an indistinct shout of warning reached Snap he neither understood nor heeded it. From time to time he saw the hunted man ahead of him, and once he distinctly saw the little girl in his arms. Surely

he was gaining on him. At any rate he was leaving his own companions far behind. Even the tough cattleman's frame had no chance against the legs and lungs of a schoolboy of eighteen.

How long Snap ran the madman in view he never knew, but at last he lost him. Panting and tired, he pulled up; climbed first one knoll and then another, and still no sight of the man or *of his own comrades*. It was now so dark that he could hardly see the tracks in the snow; the forest a few yards from him was dim and indistinct, and every minute the darkness deepened. He shouted. His shout seemed hardly to travel further than his lips, it seemed so faint and feeble. It was for all the world like standing by the seashore and trying to cast a fly on the ocean. It fell at his feet. Again he cried, and this time an answer came, but such an answer! First a laugh, and then a wild eldritch screech. The boy was no coward, but a cold chill crept up to the very roots of his hair, and his heart froze and stood still at the sound. And, after all, it was only Shnena, the night owl, calling to her mate.

Being a level-headed and cool lad, Snap soon realised that he had outrun his friends, and that they had (thanks to the darkness) missed his trail and lost him. He had often read of lonely nights in the forest, and envied the heroes of the story, but somehow he did not care about the reality as much as he had expected. The typical 'leather-stockings,' he remembered, always had matches, made a fire and sometimes a bush shelter, lit a pipe, and ate pemmican. Now Snap felt that, though extremely hot now, he would soon be

bitterly cold, but he had no matches, did not know how to build a shelter, had no pemmican, and did not smoke. As for that buffalo robe, of which so much is always made in dear old Fenimore Cooper's books, there might be one within a few miles, but if so its four-footed owner was probably still wearing it. Snap remembered that a trapper who had no matches rubbed bits of wood together until he had got a light by friction. This was a happy thought, and, taking out his knife, he carefully cut a couple of pieces of dry pine from a stump hard by, and then collected as big a bundle as possible of twigs and dead wood, which he deposited on a spot previously cleared of snow. Then he rubbed the wood, and rubbed the wood, and continued to rub the wood, but nothing came of it. Presently he tried a new piece ; rub, rub, rub, he went, and a large drop of perspiration dropped off the tip of his nose with a little splash quite audible in the intense stillness. Then he gave it up, voted Fenimore Cooper a fraud, or at any rate came to the conclusion that his receipts for kindling fire were not sufficiently explicit.

For a time he sat still and listened. He has confided to a friend since that he could 'hear the silence.' Certainly he could hear nothing else, unless it were the sudden creaking of some old tree's bough weighted with too much snow. And then his thoughts went after the madman. A thought struck him, and even Snap never fancied that it was the cold alone which made his knees knock together and his teeth rattle so. What if, now that he was alone, the madman should turn the tables and hunt him ? Was not that him he saw sneaking over the snow in the dim light

of the rising moon? Snap sprang to his feet with a crackle, accounted for by the fact that part of his clothing had frozen to the log on which he had been sitting, and had elected to remain there. Snap put his hand ruefully behind him. It was very cold even with clothes, it would be colder without! However, as he rose the shadow moved rapidly away, taking the semblance of a dog to Snap's eyes as it went. By-and-by a long blood-curdling howl told the boy that the shadow he had seen was sitting somewhere not far off, complaining to the moon that the plump English lad wasn't half dead yet, and looked too big for one poor hungry wolf to tackle all alone. 'Confound these forests,' thought Snap, 'and all the brutes in them, their voices alone are enough to frighten a fellow,' and then he began to wonder if he would soon go to sleep and never wake any more, and hoped, if so, that Nares would find him and send a message home to Fairbury.

At any rate the boy thought, before going to sleep for the last time, he would keep up the practice he had observed all his life, and for a few minutes the hoary pine-trees and the cold, distant stars looked down on an English boy bending his knees to the only power in Heaven or earth to which it is no shame for the bravest and proudest to bend. Like a son to a father he prayed, just asking for what he wanted, and pretty confident that, if it would not be a bad thing for him, he would get it. When he rose to his feet the forest seemed to have put on a more friendly air, the trees didn't look so rigid and funereal, the stars were not so far off. Who knows, perhaps Nature,

God's creation, had also heard the boy's prayer to their common Creator.

For hours and hours, it seemed to him, Snap tramped up and down, like a sentry on his beat, beneath the pine at whose foot lay his unlit fire. After a while he began to dream as he walked, for surely it was a dream! Somewhere not far off from him he could hear a human voice, and hear it moreover so distinctly that the words of the song it sang came clearly to his ears. Snap shook himself and pinched himself violently to be sure he was awake, and then stood still again to listen. Yes, there was no mistake at all about it.

Hush-a-by, baby, on the tree-top,
When the wind blows the cradle will rock,

crooned the voice, and its effect in the stillness of the night was to frighten Snap more even than Shnena or the wolf. Creeping in the direction from which the sound came, so stealthily that he did not even hear himself move, Snap got at last to a point from which he could see the strange singer. Crouching under a log sat the wretched lunatic, naked to his waist, his grey hair hanging in elf-locks over his eyes, and in his arms a bundle, wrapped round in his own coat and shirt, which the poor fellow rocked as a woman rocks her child, singing the while a snatch of a song which he had heard in happier days sung to his own little ones. There were tears in Snap's eyes as he looked, and he longed to go to the man's help, but he dared not. Alone he would have no strength to compel the lunatic to do what was reasonable, and to talk to him would be idle. At that moment the

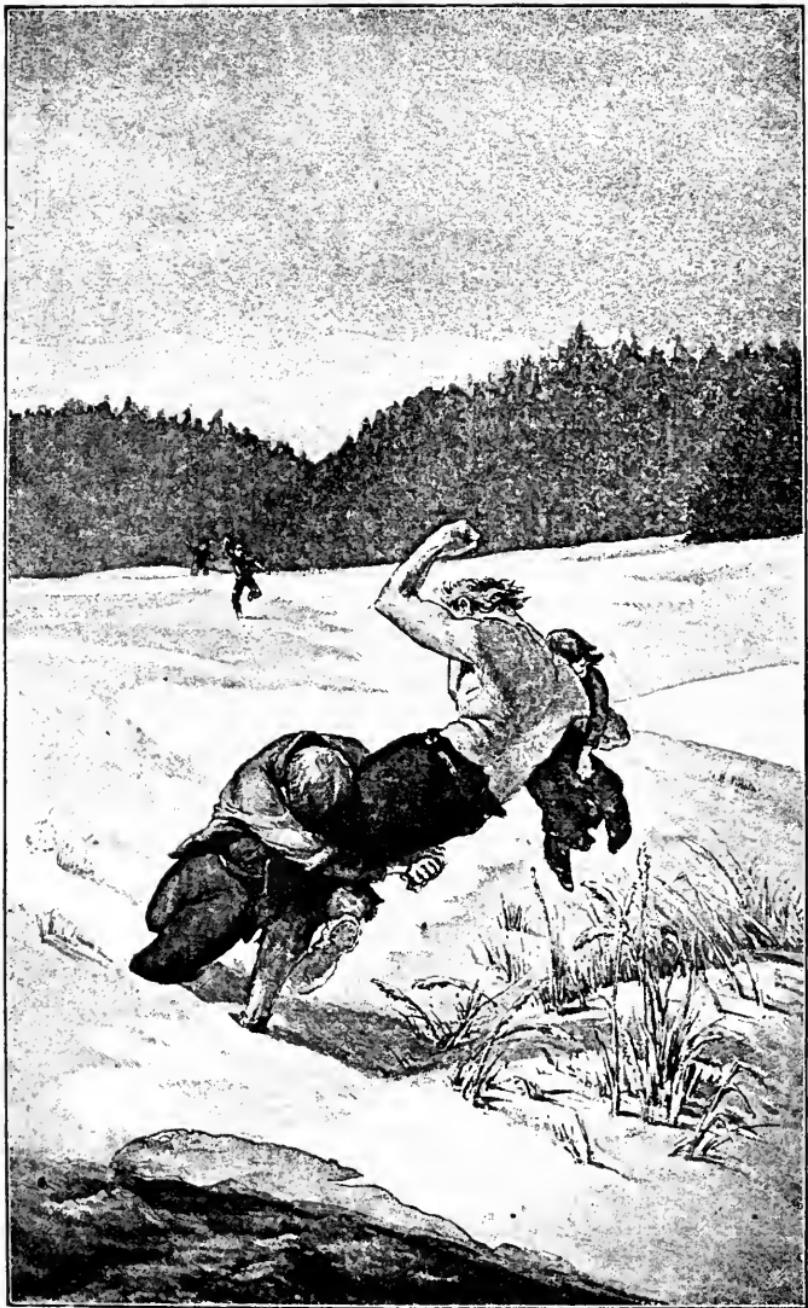
man looked up and sat listening like a wild beast who hears the hounds on his scent. ‘They want to take you too, my darling,’ he whispered, and Snap could hear every word as if it had been yelled into his ears, ‘but they shan’t, the devils! they shan’t; we’ll die together first!’ Muttering and glancing back, the man crawled on hands and knees into the scrub and was gone. Snap rubbed his eyes; it seemed like a dream, so noiselessly did the madman creep away and disappear. As he stood, still staring at the place, Snap heard a bough crack behind him, then another and another, and the tread of men approaching in the snow. In another minute Nares had the boy by the hand, the weary night-watch was over, and a match inserted amongst the twigs sent up a bright flame as cheering as the voice of his friends. Having partially thawed, and eaten as much as he could, Snap told Nares and his two companions what he had just seen, and as morning was just breaking, and active exercise seemed the boy’s best chance of ever getting warm again, the four once more took up the trail.

Stooping down over the tracks made by the maniac as he crawled into the scrub, Nares uttered an ejaculation of horror. ‘Poor wretch,’ he said, ‘look at that,’ and he pointed to a huge track, which looked half human, half animal, in its monstrous shapelessness. ‘It’s his hand, frost-bitten and as big as your head,’ said Bromley; ‘he can’t go much further, I’m thinking.’ But he did, and it was full day when the pursuers came out upon a bit of prairie and saw in front of them the broad flooded waters of

the Thompson River, and a short distance ahead of them a miserable hunted man still staggering on with his load. As he saw him the child's father uttered a cry and dashed to the front. The madman heard it, looked back, and fled wildly towards the river. Madness uses up the life and strength rapidly, no doubt, but the wasting flame burns fiercely while it lasts, and this last effort of the frost-bitten dying man seemed likely to make pursuit hopeless. 'He is going for the river, heaven help the child!' gasped Nares. About four hundred yards before reaching the river, a broad but slow-running watercourse ran parallel to the Thompson. This was frozen over owing to its shallowness and the sluggishness of its waters. Even the Thompson had a thin fringe of ice on its edges. Without pausing, the madman dashed on to the ice of the stream, which swayed and broke beneath his weight. Crash, crash, he went through, first here, then there, but somehow, though the whole surface of the ice rocked, he struggled on hands and knees from one hole to the other, and reached the farther side in safety. But his troubles in crossing had given his pursuers time to close upon him, and as he gained the shore Snap saw the child's father draw a revolver with a curse and fire at his child's would-be murderer, for that the madman meant to plunge into the Thompson with his victim, and so elude his pursuers, seemed now beyond a doubt. For some reason, for which he could not account, Snap's sympathies were with the wretched madman, and without pausing to think he knocked up the Irishman's revolver before he could fire a second shot, and dashed

on to the weak and broken ice. 'I never gave it time to let me in,' Snap explained afterwards, and, indeed, with his blood up as it had never been before, and strong with years of Fernhall training, the boy seemed to skim across the ice like a bird.

And now they were on the flat together, with the strong black river ahead. Death the penalty, the child's life the prize. If Snap's friends wished to, they could not get to him soon enough to save him, had the madman turned. Luckily for Snap, the hunted man never looked behind him, but naked, frost-bitten, bleeding, struggled on for his terrible goal. If Fernhall boys could have seen Snap then they would have remembered how that young face, white and set, once struggled through a Loamshire team just at the end of a match, and won the day for Fernhall. Football, unconsciously, was perhaps what the lad was thinking of at the moment, as step by step he gained on his prey, and yard by yard the black river drew nearer. At last it was but thirty yards away, and with a final effort Snap dashed in. 'Take 'em low,' the Fernhall captain had said in old days, 'never above the waist, Snap,' and Snap remembered the words now. With a rush he was alongside, down went his head with a scream that he couldn't repress, his long arms wrapped round the madman's knees, and pursued and pursuer rolled headlong to the ground on the very edge of the angry flood. How long they struggled there Snap didn't know. It was worse than any 'maul in goal' in old days, but, like the bull-dog of his land, once he had his grip, Snap would only loose with life. In vain



SNAP AND THE MADMAN

the madman bit and struck, rolling over and over, shrieking with rage and fear. Hiding his head as much as possible, Snap held on, getting eomparatively very few serious injuries, before strong hands dragged his opponent down, and as prairie and river and sky seemed to fade away a kindly voice said ‘Thank God, the boy’s all right.’

When Snap recovered from the swoon which fatigue and hunger, cold and blows, had ended in, he found himself rolled in blankets, under just such a shelter as twelve hours ago he had longed to make for himself; a little yellow-haired girl was sleeping near him, and a huge fire throwing its rosy gleams on both, and on the kindly, bearded face of Nares, the cattleman, busy over a kettle of soup. The unfortunate cause of all their trouble was happier even than Snap. When Nares and Bromley, and the father of the little girl, had come up and overpowered him and released Snap, life seemed almost to leave the poor maniac. Blood was streaming from his side where the first revolver bullet had entered; his hands were swollen and dead to all feeling; his body was frost-bitten, but his mind was happily a blank; and before they could make a fire or do anything for his eomfort, a more mereiful Friend than they looked down and took the poor fellow to meet ‘his chicks’ in a kingdom where frost-bite and railway accidents are unknown.

CHAPTER IX

‘THAT BAKING POWDER’

‘WELL, boss, we did think as you’d took root in Chicago, or mebbe that the Armours had put you through their pork-making machine.’

‘Well, no, not quite that, Dick, you old sinner. How are the boys?’ replied Nares to a grey-headed old man, who was sitting complacently on the driver’s seat of a cart, and watching ‘the boss’ put his own luggage on board. There are no porters and no servants, even for a big cattle-man, out west.

‘How air the boys, you said. Well, right smart and active at *meal-times*, thank ye, and pretty slack at any other. But what’s that, anyway, that you’re bringing along?’ and the old man’s eyes rested with a look of no little disgust on the English-dressed and (to Western eyes) soft-looking lad, Snap Hales.

‘That!’ replied the boss, ‘that is just—well, let me see, a colt I want you to break; a child I want you to nurse, Dick,’ replied Nares.

‘Nuss? I’ll nuss him,’ growled the old man. ‘We don’t want no loafers up at Rosebud.’

Poor Snap coloured up to his eyes, but felt more comfortable as Nares gave him a wink and a hand-up into the cart.

'Now then, air you fixed behind?' cried Dick.

'We are,' replied Nares.

'Then git,' yelled his foreman, bringing his whip across his horses' flanks, and for the next five minutes Snap and Nares, and the boxes, bags, &c., of each of them, bounded about like parched peas in a pan.

As the old man gradually steadied his horses to a trot, he turned round with a grin.

'That's pretty well sorted you, I reckon,' said he, 'and may be took the first coat off your tender-foot's hide.'

Luckily for the tender-foot (our friend Snap), it is one of the laws of nature that, given a lot of objects of various weights shaken up together, the lightest invariably comes to the top. During the last five minutes he had varied his seat frequently from the uncompromising corner of a trunk to the yielding and comfortable person of the burly Nares, from whose waistcoat (being of a pliant and springy character) the next bump would have removed him to a seat upon the prairie. Luckily, that bump never came.

Mile after mile of prairie rolled by, yellow where the snow (very thin hereabouts) left it uncovered, and apparently too sterile to feed a goat. Further on it improved, and great tufts of golden bunch grass showed through the thin sprinkling of snow, and here and there a sage-hen fluttered up or a jack rabbit scuttled away.

About noon our friends crossed a river, on the further side of which were the feeding-lands of Nares's ranche. Some miles again from the river was a range of low rolling hills and broken lands, the shelter provided by Nature for the beasts of the field against

blizzards and snowstorms. Nares used to boast his ranche had every advantage obtainable in America—plenty of water, river-lands to cut hay upon for winter feed, hills and broken land for shelter in storm-time, and a railway handy to take produce to market. There are very few such ranches nowadays in America, as even its great prairies are not boundless—a fact much overlooked by its go-ahead citizens.

'I reckon the cows sold pretty well, boss, this year,' suggested the old man when he had unhitched the team and kindled a bit of a fire for lunch.

'Yes, they sold well, Wharton, and none of them got damaged on the way down. There won't be much to do on the ranche now till spring,' added Nares.

'Guess that's why you're bringing an extra hand along,' snapped the old man. 'Why! Jeehoshaphat! what's the matter with you now?' he shouted.

Poor Snap had tried first one side of the fire, then the other, with an equal want of success. On one side the smoke nearly choked and blinded him, on the other worse things awaited him. A blanket, which just accommodated 'the boss' and Wharton, was stretched on the windward side of the fire. With a weary sigh Snap threw himself down beside it. With a yell of pain he bounded up again, holding first one foot, then the other, in the air, and all the time applying his hands sorrowfully to the softest part of his person. The old foreman had laid a trap for the tender-foot, and he had sat upon it, the 'it' being a bed of what the natives call prickly pears, a peculiarly vicious kind of cactus about the size of a small potato, which unobserved spreads all over the ground, and sends its

long thin spines through everything which presses upon them. When, at last, the good-natured Nares understood his friend's sorrows, and had managed to stop laughing, he gave Snap a place on the blanket, and, turning him over on his face, proceeded tenderly to pluck him. It is no fun to be converted at a moment's notice into a well-filled pincushion.

At lunch Nares told old Wharton the story of the maniac-hunt recorded in the last chapter. As he told the story of little Madge's danger and salvation Wharton's eyes wandered from 'the boss' to the boy beside him. At last, when the story was over, he sighed softly 'Jee-hosh-a-phat.' Then he rolled his quid and expectorated. Then he got up and held out his great fist to Snap with these words, 'Say! were them pears prickly? Well, never mind. I guess you needn't sit on no more now. I'm a-gwine to be your "nuss," Britisher; ' and it is only fair to add, the old man kept his word.

An hour or two afterwards Nares and Snap got out at Rosebud, and our hero entered his new home, a big one-storied house built of rough logs dovetailed into each other, the cracks filled up with moss and covered over with clay. Indoors, the floor was covered with skins. On the walls were antlers of deer and wapiti and mountain sheep, from which hung half a dozen rifles, hunting-knives, &c. There was a bench or two about the place, a big table, at one end a huge open stove, and along the walls were ranged a dozen shelves or bunks not unlike those you see on board ship. A small room opened off from the main apartment, and in this Nares himself slept and kept his

accounts. Outside were some few smaller buildings—a cook-house, a forge, and so on. A huge piece of land enclosed with rough timber fencing ran alongside the house. This was a corral for horses or weak cattle. A smaller corral for horses likely to be wanted at a short notice also adjoined the ranche.

'Now, Snap,' said Nares, 'this is Rosebud. Rosy enough for a worker, what we call a "rustler" out here, but not a bed of roses for a loafer. There's your bunk when you are up here, but I expect you'll be wanted out on the feeding-grounds most of your time. Anyhow, for the first day or two you can help me with the books, and try your hand at the cooking.'

So Snap tried his hand at bread-making and failed; flour and water won't make bread of themselves, and, even when you have made your dough, if you don't flour your hands the compound will stick to them. However, old Wharton set the boy right and gave him the soup to look after.

'Put some salt in it,' said the old chap, 'you'll find it in a tin up there,' pointing to a shelf over his head. 'You'd better just taste it to see as you get it right. The boys don't like no fooling with their broth.'

So Snap got down the tin and put a couple of spoonfuls into the broth and tasted it; two more, and tasted again; and still the compound did not seem salt enough.

'I say, Wharton,' said Snap, after tasting the salt itself, 'this is very weak salt of yours.'

'Guess it is,' replied the old man, 'table-salt the boss calls it; I call it jist rubbish. But never mind,

shove in the lot if it don’t taste strong enough.’ So in it went, and Snap stirred vigorously, added some onions, and himself looked forward to a share of his *chef d’œuvre*.

By-and-by the ‘boys’ trooped in, tall, bronzed fellows in great wideawake hats, loose shirts, and huge spurs. Each brought his saddle with him and chucked it into a corner as he entered. ‘How do, boss?’ they remarked; ‘How do, Wharton?’ and then most of them added, staring at Snap, ‘Why, who the deuce are you anyway?’ This question having been satisfactorily answered, all sat down to food, and Snap thought he had never seen such a rapid and wholesale consumption of meat and drink in his life.

‘Where are the rest of the boys?’ asked Nares of one of the three who had come in.

‘Gone after a band of cattle which we found after you left, boss. I guess we’ll have ‘em in to-morrow. There are several want branding: one old scrub bull in partickler.’

‘Yes,’ added another, ‘and I’m thinking he’ll go on wanting for some time yet. You can’t hold him with any ropes on this ranche.’

Gradually even the cowboys’ appetites seemed satisfied, and one by one they stretched themselves out on rugs by the fire, and puffed away silently at their pipes. They were long thin men for the most part, and tightly belted at the waist.

‘Mighty good soup that to-day,’ said one.

‘Glad you liked it,’ said Snap proudly; ‘I made that. I don’t think it was bad for a first attempt.’

'Satisfying, anyhow,' said Nares, 'I never felt so full before.'

'Yes, I'm full up,' added someone else, and then silence again ensued for a space. Presently there was a crack and the tinkle of falling brass, and a button flew on to the hearth.

'Bless me,' cried old Dick Wharton, 'if I don't feel as if I was getting fuller every minute.' This seemed to be the general feeling; even Snap shared it.

'Why, what in thunder's the matter?' cried Frank Atkins, leanest and hardest of hard riders. 'This yere belt has gone round me with six holes to spare these two years, and now it won't meet by an inch.'

It certainly was odd. They had sat down like Pharaoh's lean cattle, they had risen like his fat cattle, and they had gone on 'rising' ever since, until now they were all portly as aldermen. Suddenly a light dawned upon Wharton.

'Say, boy, what did you put in that broth?'

'Nothing,' said Snap, 'except salt and onions.'

'Where did you get that salt?'

'Why, out of the tin over your head,' said Snap.

'This 'un, eh?' inquired the old man, holding up a small round tin.

'Yes, that's it.'

'Wal,' said the old man slowly, 'I've heerd of Houses of Parliament being blowed up by dynamite, but I never heerd tell of a ranche being bust up by Borwick's baking-powder afore!'

CHAPTER X

AFTER SCRUB CATTLE

THAT first night Snap was glad enough to get to bed. Not that he was sleepy ; on the contrary, tired out as he was, he was preternaturally wideawake. Everything was so new to him, and, besides, that horrible Borwick was still an unquiet spirit within him. The cowboys of the North-West are probably the only possible rivals to the ostrich in the matter of digestion still extant. Like the ostrich, they could safely dine on door-nails and sup on soda-water bottles, so that they had already forgotten Borwick and were snoring peacefully. Snap wished he could imitate them. The bed in which he found himself combined all the advantages of a bed and a thermometer. Founded upon pine boards, it consisted of five pairs of blankets. In summer heat you slept *on* one blanket out of doors. In temperate weather you slept under one indoors. As it grew colder the number of blankets above you increased, until four above (with a buffalo-robe) and one below indicated blizzards and frostbite on the prairie.

It seemed to Snap that just as he was going off to sleep someone struck a match, lit a pipe, and then began lighting the fire. This was old Wharton, but

he let the boy lie (being a charitable old soul) until he roused him up with :

'Now, lazybones, you can wash in the crik outside if you've a mind to, only breakfast is ready.'

Snap hopped out of his blankets and ran down to the crik, although no one else seemed to care about it, and so biting was the cold that he felt it would have been worth his last dollar to be allowed to take a hand at the wood-chopping going on outside. The worst of it was that he couldn't chop 'worth a cent,' as big Frank Atkins informed him, and indeed, although he hit the log all over and with every part of the axe, it seemed even to Snap that he made very small progress. The sense of his own uselessness was getting absolutely oppressive to the boy as it was borne in upon him more and more that even cooking, chopping, and such like, want learning, and don't come naturally to any of us.

Breakfast was a short ceremony—bacon and jam—'trapper's jam,' that is, made from bacon grease and a spoonful of brown sugar, washed down with a huge draught of weak tea. After this everyone lit his pipe, and old Wharton, turning to Snap, said :

'You may as well go along with the boys to meet Tony and the rest with them scrub cattle. They're a bit short-handed, and I can't go myself; the boss will be making things hum here up at the ranche for the next day or two.'

A few minutes later Atkins came up with a dun-coloured pony, 'a buckskin' he called it.

'Theer,' said Wharton, 'if I'm your nuss, Shaver,

that theer's your cradle ; and you'd better get in right now.'

There was a grin on everyone's face, but Snap, though afraid of being laughed at, was afraid of nothing else, and had ridden a little since he was a very small boy, so he climbed unhesitatingly into the great cowboy saddle. As he did so his amiable 'Cradle' laid back her ears, and tried to get hold of his toe in her teeth. Being frustrated in this, she curled herself into a hoop, and began to 'reverse' as the waltzers call it. Then she stood still and waited. Atkins threw himself into the saddle and cracked his whip, Snap touched his mare with the spurs, and then the Cradle began what Wharton called 'rocking,' *i.e.* bucking, in a way that only prairie-reared horses understand. To his credit be it said, Snap sat tight for the first 'buck,' at the second he went up into very high latitudes with his legs almost round his horse's neck, at the third he 'came south,' reposing gracefully on the buckskin's quarters like a costermonger on his 'moke,' while at the fourth he sat promptly down upon the prairie, from whence he watched 'that cayouse' finish her performance by herself. When Atkins and Wharton and the rest had finished laughing, which took longer than finishing breakfast, they picked up the crest-fallen Snap and put him upon a quieter beast.

'That's one of yourn too,' laughed Wharton; 'you'd better have the six buckskins for your string, my lad, but I'd keep old White-foot just for Sundays or any time as you feel lonesome and want amusement.'

Snap didn't reply, but thought to himself that if indeed the six horses in the little corral were set aside for his use, it should not be long before he was master of the good-looking, bad-tempered brute which had just grassed him so ignominiously.

'Not hurted much, are you, young 'un?' asked Atkins.

'No.'

'That's right, let's get,' and, so saying, Atkins led off at a canter, Snap's new steed following at a gait easy as a rocking-chair.

The early morning is always the very best of the day, even in our begrimed and foggy English cities; on the plains of the North-West the morning air is as exhilarating as champagne. Every living thing feels and acknowledges the influence of the young day. Horses toss their heads and strain their strong muscles in a glorious 'breather' without encouragement from the rider, while the rider feels his blood racing through his veins, his heart beating, his brain quick and clear, and the whole man full of unconscious thankfulness to God for the delight of merely living. All that day Atkins and Snap rode towards and through the foot-hills, and at night camped where someone had evidently camped not long ago. Being handy and anxious to learn, Snap soon made friends with his companion, found the poles on which the last wanderers had hung a blanket in lieu of a tent, found some wood for firing, fetched the water for the billy, and learned how to hobble the horses.

That night he felt, as he watched the stars through the tops of the big bull-pines, he had really begun life

out west, and might after all learn to hold his own with the strong men round him. It was an improvement on the night before, when everything seemed very hopeless and strange.

Early on the second morning, Atkins and Snap heard a distant roaring in the hills. Snap's thoughts at once reverted to bears and suchlike beasts, and foolishly he gave utterance to his thoughts. Atkins laughed heartily.

'No, no, them's the cows a-coming. Didn't you know as we were near them last night?'

'Not I,' said Snap; 'how did you know?'

'I heerd 'em just afore we camped, but I knew if we'd kep' on we shouldn't have struck 'em till after dark, so I guessed we'd just camp by ourselves.'

By-and-by the lowing of the beasts, which the winding glens and resounding woods had so magnified and distorted to Snap's ears, came quite close, and Atkins told him to come 'well off the track, in here among the bull-pines, and light down, hold your horse, and for goodness' sake hold your jaw, for if old Tony hears you speak he'll not stop swearing till he has cussed all the breath out of his body.' So Snap 'lit down' and held his tongue, and presently he started as he found a pair of big brown eyes fastened on him from the bush by his side. Then there was a little frightened snort, the first sound he had heard; a beast's tail was whisked in the air, and with a plunge half a dozen, mostly yearlings, crashed past him parallel to the trail. It took nearly half an hour for the whole band, nearly sixty all told, to straggle past, feeding as they went, and it entered into Snap's mind

to wonder how anyone ever heard or saw a real wild beast if these half-tame parti-coloured oxen could go so quietly through brush and timber.

Last of all came the drivers; three cowboys they would have been called, though Snap thought the term 'boy' fitted them as badly as 'cow' fitted at least one-half of the stock in front of them. Still, on a cattle range all bulls, however old and fierce, are 'cows' to the end of their days, and all those who deal with them 'boys,' no matter how grey their hair.

That night Snap had his first turn of what he considered 'active service,' being told off to keep the cattle together for the first half of the night, another man lending him a hand to prevent accidents. Although ordered so peremptorily to keep his mouth shut on the trail, lest the sound of a strange voice should scare the beasts, he was now told that he had better sing or shout from time to time, letting the beasts hear his voice, the human voice seeming to inspire them with a certain amount of confidence.

Snap found it necessary to sing or do something of that sort for other reasons as he led his horse about or rode him slowly on his solitary rounds. After such a day as he had had his eyes were more inclined to sleep than watch, and he envied the drowsy cattle as one by one they lay down with a contented 'ouf' upon the prairie. At last all the great shadows had sunk down to rest, and all you could see in the star-light was an indistinct dark mass upon the prairie. From time to time a shadow would appear a hundred yards or so outside the group, moving silently and slowly away. Quick as thought, when this occurred,

another shadow (Snap's companion) would dash from his post and turn back the truant, feeding away from his companions, to the rest he had deserted. Snap soon learnt the game, and was getting very interested in it, when suddenly he noticed all the shadows move then rise to their feet, and, before even his galloping companion in the night-watch could get near them, they were dashing in wild, headlong flight into the darkness.

'Wake the boys and follow,' roared his companion, vanishing into the darkness after the flying beasts, and like a dream herd and herdsmen were gone, and Snap left alone. The 'boys' didn't need much waking. By the time Snap was at the camp they were up, and in an incredibly short time their horses were caught and saddled, and they were galloping after the panic-stricken beasts.

'What stamped them, rot them?' asked Atkins as he tightened his girths.

'I don't know; they were still as stones one moment and gone the next,' answered Snap.

'Bar! I reckon,' growled another cowboy; 'there always are bar about this forsaken camp.'

'You stay here till we come back, and if we aren't back by to-morrow noon make tracks for Rosebud,' shouted Atkins as he galloped off, leaving Snap alone in camp without an idea where Rosebud was or how he was ever going to get there.

However, as there was nothing to be done, he had a look first to see if his horse was all right, and then, being reassured upon that point, kicked the embers of the camp fire into a blaze, put the frying-pan, with

some cold bacon in it, left over from supper, somewhere handy for breakfast, and lay down in his rugs. In five minutes he had forgotten his loneliness, and was in as sweet a sleep as innocence and hard work ever won for a weary mortal. It was almost dawn when he woke with a start, hearing his buckskin snorting and crashing about in the bushes close to him. As he jumped to his feet he heard the frying-pan rattle, and as he glanced in that direction he saw a huge, heavy beast slope off into the forest. I say 'slope' advisedly, although it is slang. What a bear does, I suppose, is to gallop, but that word gives you an idea of great speed, which would be wrong. If I had said 'canter,' the graceful pace of a lady's hack is at once conjured up before your mind's eye, and there is very little grace in Bruin's movements. He doesn't trot, and he only 'shuffles' when he is walking. If I had said 'roll,' which in some degree describes his action, the word would not have necessarily implied the use of feet at all, so I must stick, please, to 'slope,' as being the best word to express the smooth, quiet way which a bear has of conveying himself with a certain rapidity out of harm's way.

The light was very dim, as the time was that mysterious season between midnight and dawn, and Snap knew very little about rifles, but, being thoroughly English, without counting the cost he snatched up a Winchester repeating rifle, and proceeded to 'pump lead' at the vanishing bear as long as he could see him. Then all was still again, and remained so until two cheeky little 'robber-birds,' in coats of

grey and black, came hopping round the dead embers with their heads on one side, complaining noisily that the upturned frying-pan was quite empty. Snap, too, was sorry for this, and wished that he had interrupted Bruin a little earlier in his midnight pilfering.

When the dawn had fully come, and the great red sun was climbing up into the heavens, the boy went to look at the bear's tracks. Later on, when he had learnt some of the secrets of wood-craft, those tracks would have been plain enough to him—a story written in large print, which he could easily read from his saddle. Now, groping about with his nose almost on the ground, he could not make much of them, and hardly knew the bear's tracks from his pony's. At last (and not very far from the camp fire) Snap came upon a great splash of blood. Even he (inexperienced though he was) understood this, and rightly concluded that the bear was hit. 'A deuced lucky fluke,' he said to himself honestly enough, as he went back to the fireside, his eyes brightening, as far away on the plain outside the clump of bull-pines he saw two of the cowboys cantering towards him. They were soon alongside and listened to his story, after which they went to look at the tracks.

'Wal,' said one, 'you've got the right sort o' grit, lad, but it's tarnation lucky for you that that bar as you shot at warn't the critter as stampeded them cows last night.'

'Why?' asked Snap.

'Why? wal,' replied the cowboy, 'them tracks is the tracks of a black bar, and they ain't of no account.'

The bar as stampeded them cattle last night was a grizzly, and if you'd happened to take it into your head to do a little rifle-shooting at him with that thing—wal! you wouldn't have been here this morning.'

CHAPTER XI

BRINGING HOME THE BEAR

'I RECKON you mout as weel go along o' the boy and fetch in that "bar,"' said old Tony to Atkins. 'I guess he won't travel far, by the froth in the blood.'

'Right, pard,' replied Atkins; 'come along, Snap, and leave your horse with the boys.'

Snap did as he was bid, and strode manfully after Atkins into the bush, although, from the unusual amount of riding which he had done lately, he was 'as stiff as starch' as he expressed it. Moreover, although he had simply to follow Atkins, whilst Atkins had to find and follow the trail which Snap had long since lost, he found it impossible to keep pace with the cowboy, or in any way to imitate the long, silent stride of that worthy. Snap's pace was neither swift nor silent, and I regret to say he very soon became furiously hot and desperately angry. It did not seem to matter how much he tried to avoid them, his shin was always coming in contact with dead logs over which the luxuriant ferns had grown in summer. At every stride he trod upon a dry twig, which cracked as loudly as a stock whip, and to finish his discomfiture every hazel in the forest swung back and lashed him across his eyes or nose. If he kept his temper through

all this, he found himself up to his knees in a bog hole, or a briar tweaked his cap off, or a creeper coiled round his ankle and let him down with a terrific thump. At last Atkins turned round with a compassionate grin :

' You ain't much used to " still-hunting," Shaver ; suppose you just wait here awhile, and I'll go on and see if that " bar " of yourn has any travelling left in him.'

Snap did not much relish the idea, but even he felt that if the bear was to be approached unawares he, Snap Hales, ought not to be one of the stalking party. So he sat down on a log and wondered how long it would be before he too would be able to steal swift and silent through the forest, like the tall, lean figure which had just left him. There is, no doubt, a good deal to annoy a tender-foot at first in big-game shooting in America. For a grown man to realise that he has not yet learned to walk is a rather bitter experience, and yet not one man in a thousand can walk or ' creep ' decently to game in timber, even after a good many seasons' experience.

Though not nearly as cold on the Rosebud as it had been in that other forest, in which Snap passed a night a week previously, our hero was beginning to feel quite ' crisp ' about the ears and nose before anything occurred to break the monotony of his watch.

Listening intently, every sound in the forest came clearly to his ears. The loud bell-like note of a raven far overhead interested him. He always had thought at home that a raven had but one note, that hoarse

funereal croak which, together with his colour, has got the bird such a bad name. And yet here was an unmistakable raven with quite a musical voice! Then a chipmunk came out of a hole in a log, the very one on which Snap was sitting, and regarded the intruder rigidly for a good five minutes, after which the pretty, impertinent little beast poured out a volley of chipmunk billingsgate at him, and with a whisk of his tail shot back into his house again. Snap saw the little squirrel-like head peeping at him again and again after that, curious, apparently, to see the effect of its oratory; but, being a decent lad, Snap didn't even shy his cap at his pretty reviler. By-and-by Snap heard a bough swing with a grating sound in the distance, and then, ever so softly, he heard, 'plod, plod,' 'plod, plod.' He could only just hear it, but he guessed in a moment whose slow, even tread that must be, and, brave lad as he was, the blood mounted up into his face, and his heart beat until it sounded as loud as the old dinner-gong at Fairbury. 'Ah!' he thought, 'Atkins has put up the bear after all, and here he comes, wounded and desperate, straight for me.'

So noiselessly that even the chipmunk did not notice him, Snap slipped off the log and knelt down behind it, resting the barrel of his Winchester on the log, determined to begin to shoot as soon as the feet of the foe, now drawing rapidly nearer and nearer, should bring him into an opening amongst the big trees. Crunch! crunch! came the steps, and Snap's finger was on the trigger. Next moment a big black mass would push through the bushes, the report of

the rifle would ring out, and then through the smoke what would Snap see: his first bear rolling on the ground, or a great and hideous death, all teeth and claws, coming straight at him, rather faster than the ‘ Flying Dutchman ? ’

As these thoughts coursed through his brain, and his heart ached with suppressed excitement, a voice sang out, ‘ Halloh, don’t you shoot ! Bust my gizzard, why, what in thunder do you take me for ? ’ and the next minute Atkins, hot and tired, plodded out into the open, and let a great black skin slide heavily down on to the ground at his feet.

To those who have never had a chance of comparing the footfall of a bear with that of a man, Snap’s mistake may seem ridiculous ; but even Atkins, whose life had been in serious danger, readily forgave the boy, stipulating only that for the future he should never ‘ draw a bead until he knew not only what he was shooting at, but what part of it he was trying to hit.’ Many a grievous accident would be avoided in this way, and not one head of big game lost per annum by it ; for, even if the coat you see passing through the thick timber be that of a beast of chase, it is almost a certainty that a snap-shot at it will only end in a useless wound given to some unfortunate hind, or a scratch with very bad results to the shooter if it happen to be given to a bad-tempered old grizzly.

If, by ill-luck, the coat is that of a man, it is ‘ a mountain to a molehill ’ that you shoot him dead on the spot. If any boy ever goes big-game shooting after reading my book, let him take an old hunter’s

advice, 'Know what you are shooting at before you shoot.'

'How many times did you shoot at this fellow, Snap?' asked Atkins.

'About three times at him, and twice where I thought he ought to be,' replied the boy, turning over the skin of his first bear with a loving hand. The skin was bright and in good order, and the fur deep and thick.

'Well,' laughed Atkins, 'I guess you hit him quite as often as was necessary, though, according to what you say, you must have missed him four times. I reckon you must have hit him when you were shooting at the place where he ought to have been, for the bullet has gone in behind and travelled all up him. Never mind,' he added, 'it will make a rare good robe for you this winter!'

'You have had a good tramp, Atkins, let me carry the skin,' said Snap, and Atkins, with a smile, consented.

'By George,' cried Snap, 'come up. Why, I say! Atkins, I'm bothered if I *can* carry it,' and, indeed, as Atkins knew very well, the green skin with the head on was more than anyone but a strong man could pack with comfort. However, between them they got it through the timber to the 'erik,' as Tony called a small stream by which he had tied up their horses.

'But where is Tony,' asked Snap, 'and the cattle?'

'What, the cows, you mean?' asked Atkins.

'Yes.'

'Why, bless my stars, you don't suppose that

Tony is such a tarnation fool as to let them critters stop to smell this here skin, do you? Wait till you see what our cayouses say to it,' Atkins added. 'Now then, steady, will you, quietly,' he said, approaching his own pony. 'Here, Snap, get in front of him and don't let him look round,' he added, and as Snap obeyed him he slipped the rolled-up skin behind his saddle, lashed it firm into its place, and leapt into the saddle as with a snort and a bound the pony shook itself free from Snap's hold.

Then Snap saw some real riding for the first time. Perhaps that pony never got quite six feet off the ground, and perhaps he had not lunched freely on earthquakes, but, to see the way in which he performed, you would have thought so. First, down came his nose between his knees, in spite of his rider's strong hands and the cruel curb; out went his heels like twin cannon balls; and away he went over the prairie, travelling apparently all the time on his forelegs, when he was on the ground at all, which was not often. Really, it did not seem possible that his limbs should remain united. No muscles, you would think, could stand the strain of those furious bucks and kicks. Every moment Snap expected to see the strange figure part in flying fragments, the legs one way, the body another, and Atkins in a third direction. But, though for the second time since his arrival upon the prairie Snap himself got unseated, the cowboy sat tight until he was out of sight of our hero, who, having luckily stuck to his bridle, managed to recover and remount his horse, which had become

almost as unmanageable as the one which carried the bear-skin.

Once again in the saddle, Snap made the best of his way after his friend, and some time before night-fall was agreeably surprised to see the ranche in the distance. It must be confessed that he had had no idea that he was near home until he saw the smoke from the ranche chimneys, having been completely ‘turned round’ as Yankees say. Atkins had been home some time, and the skin was pegged out to dry. Old Wharton laughed until his sides ached at the boy’s rueful plight and his very apparent stiffness. ‘Ah,’ he said, ‘I guess the Cradle don’t work very easy yet, but my word, boy, if you do want a donkey to gallop or a cayouse to kick, just you put a carrot in front of one or a bear-skin behind the other, and you won’t have to wait long, you bet.’ In the big corral was a band of about thirty-seven cattle, quite enough after their long drive, and, as Tony said, ‘likely to give anyone a nice day’s work, branding them to-morrow.’

CHAPTER XII

BRANDING THE 'SCRUBBER'

A RANCHER's life is not an easy one. The hardest work comes in spring and autumn, when the cattle are 'rounded up,' or gathered together from their feeding-grounds all over the place, and parcelled out amongst the different owners. As the great pastures have no fences to mark off one from another, of course the cattle stray, and the Rosebud herd and the Snake River herd mix with one another, and with individuals belonging to ranches even more distant than these. At the great annual round-up a certain number of cowboys from each ranche in the district meet, and proceed to drive the whole of the neighbouring ranges, collecting a vast mass of cattle as they go.

Each cowboy has about a dozen ponies with him, and in the work of the round-up even this large string is very often used up. For horse and man the work is as severe as human muscle and horseflesh can stand. During the day the men ride round by the banks of every crik, investigate every quiet glen among the hills, sweep over the rolling plains, and little by little gather up the waifs and strays into a huge herd. At night this herd has to be watched, as well as the big band of horses accompanying it.

From time to time along the route the occurrence of one of the big home ranches causes a delay. Here a great corral or enclosure of rough logs has been erected, and smaller pens of a like nature. The whole party camp near the ranche, and the cattle are herded beside it. In the morning comes the chief work of the year. Every cow with a calf at her heel is the subject of careful scrutiny. If she bears the Rosebud brand, the calf belongs to the Rosebud ranche, and has to be caught there and then and branded. If not branded whilst still a calf, the little beast will be lost to the owner, for, once grown up, with no ever-present nurse to point out to whom she belongs, the unmarked heifer belongs to anyone who can catch and brand her. There are always a few scrub cattle on every range—beasts like some of those whose capture has been described in the last two chapters—who had succeeded so far in escaping the cowboy's hot iron.

The work of 'cutting out,' that is, separating, the beasts to be branded from the rest of the herd, is to the cowboy what Rugby Union is to the schoolboy. It is full of excitement, tries every muscle of the horse, every quality, mental or physical, of the rider. This, on a small scale, was the work awaiting Snap on the morrow of his bear-hunt. Amongst the beasts driven in were a few which required to be branded, and, though their capture was mere child's play to the old hands, used to following a dodging heifer through a herd a thousand strong, it was intensely exciting to Snap. How the ponies twisted and turned amongst the crowding beasts, never for one moment

losing touch of the animal which they wanted to cut out, was a marvel to him for many a day. Polo on a quick pony is trying to a man's seat, but cattle-driving on a pony which twists like a snipe and doubles like a hare, without any warning to the rider, is even more so.

Having cut out, lassoed, and branded all that were unmarked save one, Tony and Wharton held a consultation as to that one. The men had not much to do; they had just had work enough in the crisp air to 'get their monkey up,' and were ready for anything.

'Say, Dick,' said Tony, 'shall we brand that old bull? the old varmint has had the laugh of us long enough. Let's scar his rump for him this time, anyway!'

The scrub bull alluded to by Tony was an old acquaintance of the men at Rosebud ranche. More than once had he been thrown and tied, always to break away and set the branders at defiance. Whilst the men were talking he was gradually drawing away from the herd, a strong, heavy-built beast, fierce and long-horned as a Texan bull, strong and sturdy as an English shorthorn. A short, crisply curled coat of a dull brown made him look, but for his more graceful build, more like a buffalo than a domestic beast.

'All right, boys, let's have another go at him,' assented Wharton; and Wharton, Tony, Snap, and another rode quietly out to surround and drive in the veteran. The ponies certainly entered into the spirit of the thing. Anything more meek and more inno-

cent than 'the Cradle' as he wandered casually out with Snap on his back, now and then stopping for a mouthful of grass, and again turning his back completely on the bull, Snap thought he had never seen. And yet somehow the ponies were all round the bull, and, unless he had the pluck to run the gauntlet, he had only one way open to him, and that led into the small corral. Little by little they drew in, pushing their victim so slowly in front of them that he must still have believed that he was choosing his own course, and only moving at all because he wished to. By quiet, clever generalship old Wharton and his boys got the bull within a short run of the corral. Then the bull began to hesitate. He evidently 'smelt a rat,' and did not mean to go another yard. This was the critical moment. Swinging their lariats round their heads, the four riders dashed at the bull with a yell which would have turned a party of Zulus white with envy. Snap, not to be outdone, yelled in chorus what was really a relic of the old hunting days at Fairbury, and dashed forward with the rest. For a moment the grand old beast lowered his great shaggy front, and looked as if he meant to stand the charge. If he had done so, the band of horsemen must have split upon him as waves upon a rock. But the yell and the swinging lassoes were too much for his nerves. Turning slowly, he galloped into the corral, the horses dashed after him, the huge bars of the fence were put back into their places, and the scrub bull was fairly caged. So far, so good. But this same bull had often been caged before, and was still unbranded.

'Will you rope him, Tony?' asked Wharton.

'You bet,' replied that worthy, divesting himself of pretty nearly everything except his lasso, so as to be 'pretty handy over them rails, if so be as it's necessary,' he explained.

In the corral was a post, firm-set in the ground, and stout as heart of oak. Round this Tony coiled his lasso, leaving lots of loose line and the fatal noose free. Meanwhile the bull kept his eye on Tony just as Tony kept his eye on the bull. Snorting and pawing the ground, the beast backed against the rails, and then, finding that there was no escape, lowered his head and came with a perfect roar of rage at his self-composed enemy. Tony stood his ground just long enough to throw his lasso, and then darted away. The long loop flew straight enough to its mark, but by some ill-luck failed to fix upon the bull, who, free and savage, fairly coursed poor Tony round the ring. But the cowboy 'didn't reckon to be wiped out by one of them scrubbers, no-how,' and, seizing his opportunity, scrambled over the rails of the corral like a monkey up a lamp-post, remarking, when he reached the other side in safety :

'Jeehoshaphat! I did think he would have ventilated my pants for me that time, anyways.'

At the next attempt Tony's lasso settled round the great beast's horns, tightened as he plunged past the post, and as he reached the end of his tether brought him with a stunning crash to the ground. As Snap said afterwards, 'those cowboys hopped over the fence like fleas, and had the old bull's leg tied up, and his head made fast to the pole with the strongest green

hide-rope on the ranchie, before you could say Jack Robinson.'

For a while the great beast stood trembling, and still dazed by his fall, but the sight of Tony with the branding-iron roused him to fresh fury. The huge quarters seemed to contract for a mighty effort, the shaggy neck bent down with irresistible force, the thongs of green hide creaked and then snapped, as snapped the withy bands which bound the wrists of Samson.

There were four men and a bull in the corral when those ropes broke ; there was one man and a bull still left in thirty seconds after that event. With a furious charge the monster scattered his tormentors, who fled in every direction, two over the rails and a third just in time to fling himself flat on his face and roll out underneath the bottom bar, with those sharp horns, 'straight as levelled lances,' only just behind him.

When they had time to turn they saw a sight which, if it had not been so full of peril for a dear old comrade, must have elicited peals of laughter. 'Bust me if you shall lick us,' said Tony, grinding his teeth as he heard the straining thongs begin to give ; and when the bull charged the brave old fellow held on to his branding-iron and waited. Of course the flying forms of Tony's companions drew the bull's attention, and his great horned front plunged past the one foe who disdained flight without observing him. With a shattering-crash the bull dashed against the corral-fence just too late to pound a man to pieces with his horns, and as he reeled back himself, half stunned by the tremendous collision with those un-

yielding oaken bars, the bull was aware of a fresh indignity. Tony had him by the tail!!

Yes, it's all very well to plunge and roar with rage, to swing the lithe, active foe clean off his feet, and dash him against the oak rails of your prison, O gallant Texan bull ; but that foe, half Yankee as he is now, was bred in gallant Yorkshire, and, once he has his grip, will let go when a bull-dog does, that is, when he is dead ; just then and no sooner.

And so the scrub-bull found. In vain he dashed about like a beast possessed, tore up the earth, and rent the air with furious bellowings. Tony had no idea of letting go ; his life depended on his holding on ; his muscles were like iron, and his nerves were English, hardened by a rough life in America. The absurd part of it was that at every breathing-time Tony made a fresh effort to brand his victim, for he had stuck to his iron with his one hand as tenaciously as to the bull with the other. The story takes long in the telling, but in the doing it did not take half as long. Before anyone could intervene to help the fool-hardy old man the end had come. In dashing round the ring in a cloud of dust (no one quite saw how it happened) the old man's head must have struck against the post or against a railing. As the dust cleared, the horrified spectators saw Tony standing in the ring, his head hanging, his eyes vacant, still clinging instinctively to his iron. For a moment the bull paused, almost crouching like a cat, then, with a roar of rage, hurled himself forward. The old man didn't move, didn't seem to understand, and it flashed through the minds of the helpless and horror-



TONY AND THE 'SCRUBBER'

stricken spectators that, though still standing, Tony was 'all abroad,' his wits temporarily scattered by collision with the post.

There was a muffled shock: the man was flung, like foam from the crest of a breaker, half across the corral. Three other men's forms were in the ring, a couple of revolver shots rang out, and then, side by side, Tony and the bull lay upon that sandy battlefield, reddened with the life-blood streaming slowly from each. As his companions closed round him Tony managed to struggle to his elbow, saying, with a smile which spoke volumes for his pluck:

'Sorry you killed the scrubber, boys, he'd a been kinder like a monument for me, 'cos you see he has got the Rosebud brand now; you bet, he's got the Rosebud brand—'

Poor Tony! those were his last words, and as his comrades carried him off his last battlefield they felt that the best rough-rider and the gentlest, most kind-hearted giant amongst them had done his last day's work.

A few days later, when the sun was setting on the prairie, making the whole sky crimson, and flooding the world with its last rays of light, they buried him by the river's edge, Nares reading the funeral service over him, who, though perhaps he had said less of religion than most men, had lived a life so close to Nature, and face to face with God and His works, that he must have learnt the great secret and loved the Creator, as he undoubtedly in his own rough way loved all His beautiful creation. Over Tony's grave the men set up a rough headstone, or cross, rather, of

timber, and on it they nailed the bleached skull and bones of his dead enemy; while underneath Snap burned with a hot iron some words which he remembered from Bret Harte:—

A roughish chap in his talk was he,
And an awkward man in a row;
But he never funked, and he never lied,
I guess he never knowed how.

CHAPTER XIII

WINTER COMES WITH THE 'WAVIES'

THE loss of Tony was a loss which the whole ranche felt. Had he died in the full swing of work, the machine must almost have broken down. But Tony never wanted his spell of rest except when there was nothing much to do, and he had chosen to take his 'big spell of rest' in the same way. Still, even in the winter season, his loss made a great deal of difference to Snap. With Tony the ranche was full-handed, and the boy was really more or less superfluous. Now he had his hands full. There was a man's place to supply, and he worked hard and uncomplainingly to fill it. There are a thousand things to be done about a ranche in winter: cattle to feed and water, wood to hew, repairs about the ranche which want attending to, supplies to be fetched from the nearest town. At all these things Snap took his turn. No one cares to turn out first in the morning with a bitter frost outside and make up the fire for the benefit of the rest. Even strong, hard men will lie watching to see if someone else won't volunteer, and hug themselves for their smartness when someone else turns out before them, so that they may get up in the glow of a fire which others have made. The

'boys' might well have insisted on Snap's doing this, but he was popular, and no one fagged him. They knew he was a good plucked one, so nobody bullied him. That being so, Snap set himself the work to do, and nine mornings out of ten it was Snap who raked up the ashes and blew the fire into a blaze, who woke the sleepers with a joke, and had coffee ready for the elder men. It was Snap, too, who sang the best song round the wood-fire at night; and be sure there was nothing that went straighter to the hearts of the cowboys than his fresh young voice rattling out the well-remembered words of 'The Hounds of the Meynell' or Whyte Melville's 'Place where the old Horse died.'

Some of the boys had never been in England, and knew nothing of fox-hunting, but all loved a good horse and entered heartily into the spirit of the song. And so it was that in the early morning, and late in the fire-lit evening, Snap won his way to his companions' favour. Though gently bred, they recognised him as being not only game to the backbone, but ready and willing to do a man's work. That once understood, they were his friends through thick and thin, always ready to teach him anything, to make room for him in a hunting-party, or to chaff his head off if he made a hash of either work or play. By spring Snap was in a fair way to be a useful hand upon the ranche.

And now winter was coming down upon Rosebud in real earnest. The first 'cold snap,' as it is called, had caught our friends as they crossed the Rockies, and, intensified by the height at which they were travel-

ling, had seemed very bitter indeed. After the cold snap, which only lasted from a week to ten days, came as it were an aftermath of summer, a second season of sunshine and delight, which the natives call the Indian summer.. Snap began to think that the severities of a Canadian winter were all bunkum, invented as a background for all the terrible stories of the fur-traders of old days. This Indian summer was just the loveliest October weather which a healthy man could wish for, a little crisper and keener at night than our own Octobers, but in the day so bright, so clear, so sunny, that life (however hard the work) seemed to go to dance-music all day long. Later on, however, there began to be signs of a change. One by one and in little groups all the cattle had come in of their own accord from the distant ranges. Some of them had been feeding above the foot-hills on the sweet grass of the mountain slopes, where in two months' time even the bighorn would not be able to exist. As Snap rode out to shoot for the pot, or on any work about the ranche, he would meet fresh companies of them, feeding slowly downhill towards the low land and the river bottoms. They were in no hurry, picking the tenderest 'feed' as they strolled along, and camping every night wherever they happened to find themselves, but still pressing steadily on to the warmer lands below. As the beasts stopped and stared at the boy with great, solemn, brown eyes of inquiry, he used to wonder at them at least as much as they at him. How came it, he thought, that they knew the bitter white winter was coming, although the sun was still so bright, and the uplands flooded with golden light ?

Who told them ? or did they remember from the years before ?

Nature, too, had put on her last robe but one. In a month, save for the dark green of the funereal pines, it would be white everywhere. Now, just for a season, there was colour everywhere as bright as rainbow tints, and as short-lived. The maples were clear gold or vivid crimson ; the sugar maples often showing both colours side by side in one gracefully pointed leaf. The hazels were red and gold, or, like the long oval leaves of the sumach-bush, had already turned from brilliant lake to a dull, blackish purple. They were all ready to drop and die, but their death would be as beautiful and becoming as their birth in spring-time, when birds were mating and woods a tender green, or as their life among the flowers and cool, green shadows of the luxurious summer.

As Snap lay awake at night he heard far up among the stars the clang, it seemed to him, of trumpets, as if an army passed by to battle ; or, again, a strange, solemn cry, not from quite such a height, smote his ear : ‘ honk, honk, ha, ha,’ it seemed to say—a strange, unearthly call, from things passing and unseen.

At morning, too, before dawn, he heard these cries, and a strange, swift, whistling sound would rush over the roof of the log-house. The sky seemed haunted in these late autumn days. One morning as the mists rose Snap got a glimpse of these passing armies of the air. Far away up in the clouds was a great V-shaped body of birds, the point of the V a single swan cleaving his way westward from his summer haunts in the Arctic Circle to the warmer regions of

British Columbia and the mud-flats of the mouth of the Frazer River. On other days he saw Canada geese in thousands, and snow geese (or wavies) in hundreds of thousands, all passing on the same great high-road from Hudson Bay to the West.

'Snap,' said old Wharton one morning, 'hurry up, I've just seen a gang of wavies go up the erik, flying pretty low down. I reckon they aren't going far, and young wavy is mighty good eating.'

Snap was not long getting the big duck-gun down from its peg on the beam, nor long in loading it with a great charge of shot as big as small peas.

'It ain't like shooting quail, you see,' said Wharton, 'these wavies want almost as much killing as a grizzly.'

'What are you going to take, Dick?' asked Snap.

'Oh, I'll just take the Winchester,' replied his friend; 'you let me have the first cut at them with a ball, and then as they get up let 'em have both barrels of your blunderbuss right in the thick of them.'

'All right, come along,' urged Snap.

'No hurry, my boy; they have come a longish way, those wavies, and I guess they'll take a goodish time lunching on them mud-flats and beaver meadows,' replied his less excitable companion, whose eyes nevertheless gleamed with all the excitement of a genuine wild-fowler.

By-and-by, as the two hurried down the river-bed, they could hear a loud and excited gabbling, a thousand geese all talking at once.

'Talking like senators,' muttered old Dick; 'one would think they were paid for the job, but I expect

as they've seen some country to talk about in the last day or two, between this and Hudson.'

'Last two or three days! why, how fast do they fly, Dick?' whispered Snap.

'Wal,' replied he, 'I guess I never travelled with them much, but I *should* say about sixty miles more or less an hour, and they'll keep it up too; but dry up now, for the cunning varmint put out regular scouts, and they'll hear us talking a quarter of a mile off.'

Round the mud-flats and hollows which the geese were on was a fringe of brush and reeds. Through this the two gunners forced their way. As they did so the gabbling ceased as if by magic.

'Quick, quick,' whispered Wharton, pressing forward, and as they reached the edge Snap caught a glimpse of a huge bunch of geese, all drawn together on a little bare island in the stream, their long necks stretched to the utmost, their whole attitude one of suspicion and anxiety, and the wings of one or two of them half lifted for flight. Old Dick's rifle rang out the signal for them to go—all but two, that is to say—for the old man's bullet stopped the wanderings of two of them for ever. As they rose in a cloud Snap clapped the big gun to his shoulder and let drive amongst them.

'Not bad, my boy,' cried Wharton, 'but why in thunder don't you shoot again? Hulloa! well, I *am* sugared, ha, ha, ha!' laughed the old man as, turning round, he saw Snap slowly picking himself up out of a mud-hole in which he had lately lain full length. 'Why, does that gun kick,' continued Wharton, 'or

what's the matter? How much had it in it, I wonder?

'Well,' replied Snap, 'I put about three and a half drams of powder and a good lot of shot into it, but I've fired as big a charge before at home.'

'*You* put a charge in, did you?' asked Dick; 'then that explains it, because I put one in too when you went back into the house for caps. I didn't know as you'd loaded her. No wonder she kicked; the wonder is that she didn't bust.'

Remembering the charge which he had put in for the benefit of the geese, Snap quite agreed with his friend, and, rubbing his shoulder somewhat ruefully, proceeded to collect the dead. Five geese lay outstretched on the mud island, one with his head cut clean off by Wharton's bullet, and another knocked into a cocked hat by the same missile. Three were Snap's birds, and three or four more 'winged' ones were scattered about on the stream and river-banks.

Having retrieved these, they turned home, well loaded and highly pleased with themselves. On the way back Snap noticed two more geese floating down with the stream, close under the bank. In spite of the kick he had received from his gun at the last discharge, Snap could not resist the temptation to bag another brace, and was creeping up for a shot when Wharton stopped him with:

'Hold hard, you've shot them birds once; they are both winged birds, and if we can catch 'em alive they will be worth a lot to us.'

It was soon evident that Wharton was right, for, though the geese saw their enemies and tried to hide

their heads under the opposite bank, they could not rise from the water. And then began a chase which wore out Dick's temper and Snap's wind before it was over. Although the men plunged into the water, and kept both sides of the stream guarded, they couldn't for the life of them get hold of the wily ganders, who flapped and swam, dodging cleverly, or hissing with outstretched necks and angry yellow eyes, unceasingly. When they had caught them at last it was late in the afternoon, and by the time they had gone back to fetch the dead geese which they had abandoned during the chase, and walked with them to the ranche, it was already getting dark. As they left the river a whistling sound overhead made them look up.

'More geese,' said Wharton: 'I guess they're making for them mud-flats too—please the pigs, we'll have a good time to-morrow evening.'

And so they had for a good many evenings, the two winged geese being used as decoys, and Snap and Wharton (the latter now armed with a gun) being hidden carefully in reedy ambushes hard by. It was intensely exciting work, sitting there waiting until one of the many legions of birds which passed incessantly overhead lowered to the water on which the decoy sat. At first Snap could make nothing of the shooting, and, to tell the truth, Wharton was not a bit better. He wasn't used, he said, 'to these blessed scatter-guns,' which 'weren't of no account alongside of a rifle.' If a single duck came along, Snap never hit it. If a long string passed over him, and he fired at the leading bird, sometimes nothing happened, but oftener the fourth or fifth bird, at an interval of

several yards, came down with a thump, gratifying to the pot-hunter, but not complimentary to the young gunner, who felt that he had missed his mark by as many yards as there were birds in front of the one which he bagged. After a good deal of practice he began to learn not only how far to shoot in front of the swift-flying birds, but how to swing with them, *i.e.* to keep his gun moving as he fired. Being younger than Wharton, and having shot a little at home, he soon learnt to beat the old man, who, if he could possibly help it, would not waste powder on a flying shot at all.

What most astonished Snap in this wonderful migration was that all the birds killed in the first day or two were young birds. Later on, flocks of old ones began to arrive, but all the advance guard, as it were, of the bird army, whether wavies or brent, swans or duck, were birds of that season only ; birds who had never, could never, have travelled that road before. 'It is wonderful enough,' thought Snap, 'to see the cattle all come wandering in with no one to drive them from the pastures, which will soon be all snow and ice ; it is wonderful that the birds should know that winter is coming, and be able to find their way from the bleak, frost-bound north to the more genial climates in which they winter ; but that the bird-babies, born this summer only, should lead the way, is most wonderful of all. They can't remember ! Who is it who leads them ?' And, so thinking, the boy lay down to rest, and the loud clanging of the swans, and the call of the geese, and sharp whistling of the ducks' wings all told the same story, and if

even a sparrow can't fall to the ground without His knowing, Snap thought he didn't fear the future so long as the One who guided the swans through the night and the darkness would guide him too.

This migration, which took place in November, lasted only a week or ten days, though a few late detachments kept passing perhaps for a week after the main body had gone over.

There were ten 'wavies,' or snow-geese, for every other bird which passed, and next to them in number were the Canadian geese and brent. The brent we know at home, or at least all dwellers by the shore know him, for he is the chief object of the punt-gunner's pursuit, and was at one time so common in England that up in Lancashire, where they thought he grew from the barnacles which cover ships' bottoms and breakwaters, a brace of brent were sold for three-pence. If he was as good then as a corn-fed Canada goose is now, I should like to have lived in those days; but I fancy he never was so dainty a bird as his Canadian cousin. The wavy, or snow-goose, is so numerous that the Canadian Acts of Parliament, which protect all other ducks and geese, leave this poor fellow unprotected; but then the snow-goose is like the sands on the sea-shore for number, and most of the year he dwells either in the frozen North or on Siberian tundras where gunners can't get at him.

He is a handsome bird, the snow-goose, and the older he gets the handsomer he is. As a youngster he is white all over, except his head and the tips of his wings, his head being yellowish-red and his wing-tips black. As he grows older his head grows whiter, until

at last there is nothing to mark him out from the ice-bergs and snow amongst which his life is passed, except those two or three black feathers in his wing.

The Canada goose is almost as black as his fellow-traveller is white ; a dark, smart-looking, and jauntily moving bird, not much unlike a brent, with a neat white collar round his neck.

These two species, together with swans of two sorts, 'trumpeters' and 'whistlers,' and half a dozen kinds of duck—widgeon and shoveller, pochard, pintail, and wood-duck—kept Snap, gun and mind, busy for a fortnight, and if the bag was not always heavy the pleasure was great, for Snap was what every really good sportsman is, more a naturalist than a mere shooter, and loved to watch the birds, even though they never came within range.

One evening the darkness came on without even a single wing to break the stillness. As he came down to the 'hide,' as his ambuscade was called, he put up one of those quaintly-named little ducks, a 'buffle-headed butter-ball,' but, disdaining to fire at this, he never fired a shot all night.

It was the final warning that winter was coming at last. Next day the clouds were low and yellow. Towards evening the big flakes came floating down. Next morning the world was white from river to mountain-top. The pines were snow-plumed, the rivers frost-bound ; a bitter cold seemed to sting you as you put your face out of doors ; the whole five blankets and the rug were wanted above you at night. Winter had come !

CHAPTER XIV

▲ NIGHT OF ADVENTURE

BECAUSE in this story of Snap's life there are so many adventures I don't want my boy readers to go away with the idea that life out West is all fun and frolic, for of course I know, as well as anyone, that, to a hot-blooded English boy, roughing it, and facing dangers which he just manages to overcome, are fun and frolic.

In the summer, the cowboy has a pretty idle time of it. If he is a fisherman, and there are trout-streams handy, he may while away the hours with a rod, but the rivers of the plains on which he and his cattle live are oddly enough very destitute of fish. Up in the hills, in the tarns and mountain streams, there is plenty of lovely *Salmo fontinalis*, or Canadian trout, strong and game fish, which take a fly as well as their English cousins, and make a really good fight before the angler manages to land them, bright bars of quivering purple and gold, on the grass at his feet. There are, too, towns sometimes near enough to attract the 'boys,' who think nothing of a fifty-mile ride across the prairie, and in these a good deal of the money advanced by parents at home is apt to be spent on billiards (of a very poor quality), gambling, and worse.

Luckily the autumn 'round-up' necessitates everyone's presence on the ranche, and from that time until summer there is constant, and occasionally severe, work to be done.

Snap found the worst time was from Christmas, when the really hard weather set in, until March. Luckily, the Rosebud people had laid in a very large supply of hay for winter use. Nares's rule was, 'Get in as much as can possibly be needed for the worst winter men ever saw, even though you may not want a quarter of it.'

And it was well in Snap's first year that such ample provision had been made, for not only did the snow fall continuously for many days, but it packed, thus preventing the beasts from getting at the sun-dried, self-cured prairie hay below. In the bitterest weather Snap and the other men had to go out and feed; had to visit the different bands sheltering in the coulées and hollows of the foot-hills; look after the young and the feeble; get the beasts out of the timber, where, if left alone, they would shiver and starve rather than face the bitter wind which drove them back from the feeding-ground on the bare lands below; keep an eye on the coyotes and wolves; and perform a hundred other duties which required strength and hardihood, and which were certain either 'to kill a boy or make a man,' as Wharton put it.

Nature must have meant Snap for a cowboy. His long, lean figure, broad shoulders, and red-brown skin made him look a typical cowboy, almost before he was one. Enduring as a wolf, he made up by staying-

power what he lacked in muscles, and day by day these developed through constant use.

The severe weather had brought down other beasts from the hills besides the patient oxen. Now and again, as Snap went his rounds, he saw in the snow a track into which both his own feet would go without destroying its outline. Sometimes, after following this track for a while, he would find patches of blood on the trail, and then a dead steer, torn by the huge claws and mangled by the teeth of 'old Ephraim,' as the trappers used to call the grizzly. If the beast had been killed some time, there would be other tracks near—wolf and coyote—showing that others had finished what the fierce king of the forest had begun. A dose of arsenic hid in the flesh that was left would generally enable the cowboys to cry quits with the wolves, and go some way towards compensating for the death of the steer by the acquisition of three or four handsome skins, but the grizzly himself never touched a 'doctored carcase.'

When Christmas came round it brought letters for Snap which kept his imagination busy all day. One was from the Admiral, another from the little mother, and a third from the guardian. The Admiral's accompanied a pair of field-glasses which had belonged to the dear old fellow for ages, and through which he had looked over many a stormy sea and sunny land. Through them he had seen the edges of all the world, the ports of every country, the shattered, shot-torn rigging of the enemy's fleet, and perhaps the powdered faces of many a European *prima donna*. 'Now,' he wrote, 'they are no good to me. Even these glasses

won't help you to see through a London fog, and it's hardly respectable for the Chairman of the 'Company associated for the Culture and Civilisation of Puffin Islands' to be seen at a theatre. So, Snap, I send them to you. I wish I could look through them, my boy, and see you tending the cattle on a thousand hills.'

So the old gentleman was the director of a company, and Snap, knowing him well, thought that the shareholders in that company were luckier than their director, for, if downright honesty would insure the payment of a dividend by Puffin Islands, Puffin Islands, under the command of the Admiral, would pay. Poor old gentleman, it was a change to him, trudging into the City through sludge and fog to talk about guano and its prospects, instead of with gun and spaniel pottering about Fairbury coverts on the off chance of a 'cock.'

Then there was a letter from the 'mother,' concealing the miserable life she and her gallant old brother were leading in a dingy London back-street—a letter full of thanks to Snap for looking after her 'other two boys' on the way out, and regretting that the three could not be all together. She sent Snap what she imagined would be useful Christmas presents, and the tears came into his eyes as he thought of the weary hours which she must have spent stitch-stitching in the gloom of a London parlour to make those useless white robes for him. For, indeed, they were useless. Two of them were night-shirts—linen night-shirts!—to sleep in in a country where, if you touched an axe out of doors, the cold made it cling to your

hand until either the skin came away on the axe or you put axe and hand together into hot water to thaw and dissolve partnership. He treated them very reverently at first, but, long after, Snap confessed that they had been very useful '*as overalls*, with a pudding-bag used as an extempore night-cap, for *stalking wild-fowl in the snow-time.*'

Then there was a long letter from his guardian reminding Snap that, 'had he only been advised by him, he might now be occupying an honourable position in commerce or the law, and making his way to a fair competency in his maturer years.'

'Yes,' muttered Snap, 'and supping on blue pills, with a breakfast of black draught, or (if very well) only Eno, to follow. No, thank you, my worthy relative,' muttered the boy. 'I prefer these "Arctic solitudes and uncultured men," as you civilly call them, to a solicitor's office, any day.'

Snap's guardian fell into a common error. Civilised himself, he couldn't understand the beauties of barbarism. Snap could ; and of the two, barbarism and civilisation, thought barbarism the better horse.

The odd thing that Christmas was that there was no letter from Frank or Towzer, to whom Snap had already written more than once. Later on, Snap got a letter, but, as we will ourselves visit the other boys shortly, it is unnecessary to refer further to that here.

The Admiral's glasses nearly led Snap into a bad scrape, though the glasses were in no way to blame for it. As he stood trying them from the door of the ranche-house one morning, he said to Wharton, who was beside him :

'Dick, I believe I can see a band of cattle making up towards the line.'

'Like enough,' replied Dick, 'for there is, maybe, some little feed up that way; but you had better turn them, if you can, we don't want to lose any that way.'

'What way, Dick?'

'Why, if they get on the line the train may catch them before we do, and the C. P. R. won't stop for a beast or two; the "cow-catcher"' (a great iron fender in front of the engine) 'will just pick them up and chuck them off the rails in heaps.'

'The deuce,' muttered Snap, 'then I'd better go; the boys are out, and if the silly brutes go on as they are going now they'll just about get on to the line by the time the passenger train comes along.'

So saying, Snap threw his big Mexican saddle on his pony and started in pursuit, although it was already late in the day.

It soon became evident that his guess had been a correct one. He had lost sight of the beasts for a while, it is true, as they had passed through a thin belt of timber which temporarily hid them from him, but their tracks led straight on for the line. Still, there was lots of time, and, after all, the cattle would not be such fools, he thought, as to climb on to the line itself, where, of course, there could be no feed.

But they did. When Snap next saw them there were about two dozen beasts wandering aimlessly up 'the track' itself, towards the great trestle-bridge which spans the canyon (or gully) of the 'Elk Horn

Crik.' The line here runs along a cutting in a hill-side, and Snap, leaving his pony below, climbed painfully up to the level of the line.

Once up there, his work was only begun. Do all that he would, he could not get the beasts to leave their perilous pathway. They would not let him get up to them, but steadily jogged on in front of him towards the trestle-bridge. Having tried in vain to get round them, Snap looked at his watch. He had still nearly twenty minutes to spare before the train was due. If he could run the brutes up to the trestle-bridge they would never try to cross that, and he would be able to turn them down the bank, which, terribly steep as it was, was in places just practicable for the sure-footed, prairie-reared cattle.

So he pressed on, driving the cattle against time, as the dark grew ever darker, and the train nearer and nearer to the bridge. At last he thought as he ran that he could hear it far away in the hills, a low, distant, rattling noise, heard plainly for a moment, and then lost again as some high ground was brought by a twist of the line between him and it. The trestle-bridge, however, was in sight, and in another minute he had the satisfaction of seeing the stupid beasts trot up to it, stop, and then, first one, then another, turned and scrambled in headlong fashion down the bank. All except one. One perverse brute, a thorough Texan, 'all horns and tail,' would not follow his companions, but elected to try the bridge.

Perhaps my readers do not know what a trestle-bridge is. To understand the story, it is necessary that they should do so. A trestle-bridge, then, such

as the one before Snap, is a bridge of timber, the beams laid at right angles to the line, and each beam about two feet from its neighbour. Across the beams run the iron rails, and between the beams is nothing at all but emptiness. The whole bridge is supported on a huge scaffolding, which rises from the sides of the canyon crossed, and in some cases these bridges are as much as 150 yards from end to end, and 250 feet above the stream which generally races along below. To walk over these bridges by daylight requires a clear head and steady nerves, for, though it is easy enough to stride from beam to beam for a few yards, it becomes more difficult as you proceed: the light gleams off the water below, flickers through the open spaces and dazzles you, while the sight of the vast profound underneath, and the knowledge that one false step will send you whirling between those beams to eternity, has not a steadyng effect upon you.

These bridges are, most of them, very narrow, and on the one in question there was but a single line, the shunting station immediately preceding the bridge, which was not considered equal to the weight of two trains at the same time. And on this bridge the black Texan steer had elected to ramble. Clever as a goat, it stepped from beam to beam; then, as the light flickered up into its eyes, it grew nervous and stopped, afraid to come back, and afraid to go on.

Again Snap heard the warning rattle of the coming train amongst the hills, a faint whistle, and then again silence. He had saved all the herd but one. Should he leave that one?

‘No, I’m blowed if I will,’ muttered the boy, setting

his teeth and feeling just as stubborn as the steer in front of him. ‘That train won’t be up for another quarter of an hour—you can hear it coming for miles on a frosty night like this,’ he argued, and boldly enough he started on to the bridge, stepping freely from beam to beam.

The steer, seeing him coming, moved slowly on, trembling in every limb, but still determined not to be headed.

‘Confound the brute,’ thought Snap, ‘I shouldn’t wonder if he means me to follow him across the Rockies. I *will* head him, though! ’

Just then the steer made a false step. One leg went just short of the beam on to which it had intended to step. It lurched forward, and for one moment Snap thought it had gone over into the abyss. But it recovered itself somehow, and stood trembling in every limb, and bellowing piteously in its fear.

Then, unfortunately, Snap himself looked down through the ribs of that skeleton bridge. It was getting dusk now, and he could not see very clearly; but below he could hear the roll of waters amongst the boulders, he could see the tops of trees far below him, and occasionally a white flash of foam where the river dashed against a black rock. He didn’t like it, ‘you bet,’ as he said afterwards, ‘he did *not* like it,’ and the more he looked the less he liked it.

For some reason, unexplained, his knees at this juncture acquired an unhappy knack of knocking together, and grew weak and uncertain. With a start he pulled himself together. This would not do

at any price. There was another hundred yards of bridge to traverse, and he hardly thought, if the train was 'on time,' that he would be able to coax that steer across before the train reached the bridge.

At that moment a roar sounded behind Snap—the roar and rattle of a huge engine, and then a piercing shriek from the steam-whistle—such a shriek, so shrill, so wailing, that it sounds among the lone peaks of the Rockies like the cry of some tortured spirit.

Snap's heart turned to stone in that awful minute, as the red light rounded the bluff not a hundred yards from the head of the bridge, and rushed towards him. Then the blood came back to his cheek, and the strength to his arm. Death was staring him in the face. Unless he DID something, he had not ten seconds to live. He would have raced for the other end of the bridge, but his brain was keener now than ever in his life before, and he knew human speed would avail him nothing in the time allowed him. In another few seconds the cow-catchers would sweep him off the track and hurl him down, down, rushing through the air over that narrow edge to the sharp, wet rocks below. The rails themselves were so near the edge of the bridge that a man could not stand outside the rails and escape. The foot-board of the train would sweep him down, or the wind from the engine blow him into space. There was only one thing to be done, and with a muttered prayer he did it. Dropping on his knees in the middle of the track, he seized a beam with both hands, lowered himself through the opening, and hung by his hands, dangling over the depth below. If he let go it meant

death. His muscles were strong, his grip desperate, but could he hold on when the timbers rocked beneath the great mass of wood and iron which was even now upon them ?

It was all like a horrible nightmare. He could see and hear everything so plainly, and think so clearly and so fast. Far down below he heard a great tree crack with the frost ; looking up, he could see the Texan steer stupefied with terror. Then the bridge rocked and his hands almost lost their grip ; a blaze of lurid light flashed in his eyes and blinded him ; a breath as of a furnace licked his face for one moment and made him sick with horror ; two or three great, bright sparks of fire dropped past him, down, down, into the darkness ; there was a dull thud, and a mass of broken limbs was shot out into the dark night to fall with a faint splash into the river below ; and then the train had passed, and Snap hung there still—saved from the very jaws of death.

Then, and not till then, the full horror of the thing came upon him. Then, and not till then, pluck, and coolness, and strength deserted him. He had held firm to the beam when it shook like a leaf in the blast, now he tried to draw himself up and he could not. He, Snap Hales, to whom the horizontal bar in the gymnasium at school had been a favourite plaything, could not, to *save his life*, draw himself up to his chin, and for a moment his fingers began to let go and he thought of dropping down, that he might have done with the struggle and be still.

Then he tried again. He felt that if he failed this time he would never succeed afterwards ; his strength

was all going fast, and inch by inch he dragged himself up with desperate effort, until at last he lay with a gasp half-fainting along the bars.

A long blood-curdling howl from somewhere in the mist-filled gorge beneath brought him to himself. Was it possible, he thought, that *they* had smelt the fresh blood already? Only five seconds more of indecision—a little less strength to regain his position upon the bridge—and his own shattered body might have made a meal for those grim and hungry scavengers! It was a horrible thought, and as he stepped clear of those dangerous timbers Snap looked up thankfully at the bright stars and beyond.

It was now dark save for the starlight; but that, reflected from the snow, was already bright enough to travel by. Later on, when the night was undisputed mistress of the earth, it would be light enough to read a letter on the prairie.

Unfortunately for Snap, he was likely to see a good deal of a Canadian winter night before he got home to the cheerful fire in the ranche-house. Misfortunes, they say, never come singly. In this instance the proverb was justified, for on looking for his pony Snap found it had broken away from the tree to which he had tied it, and had gone back towards home.

Snap was not only disgusted, but puzzled. A tramp home after his recent experiences was not quite what he would have chosen, and that the old 'Cradle' should have played him such a trick passed his understanding.

Just then a cry which reverberated amongst the

great pines, and seemed to fill the forest with horror, explained the mystery. It was the cry of the hungry mountain lion seeking his prey by night. Snap glanced at the pine to which his horse had been tied. Yes, thank goodness, his rifle was there ! it had not been strapped to his saddle ; and as the boy got hold of his weapon confidence returned to him. If only he could get clear of the forest on to the open prairie he had no fear of the cowardly, sneaking brute behind him.

He tried to sing as he walked, to show his confidence and scare the beast with the sound of the human voice. But it was no good, he could not sing in that forest. Its awful silence rebuked him : the cold stars looked down, it seemed to him, in stony scorn, and his voice seemed so little and insignificant amongst all these mighty children of mother Nature.

Now and again the ice upon some stream, or the frozen limbs of some great tree, cracked like a loud rifle-shot. All else was still, except now and again for the voice of the red beast sneaking behind the boy somewhere in the shadows, still following, still afraid to attack.

The silence and lifelessness of a North American forest in winter is very impressive. The snow which covers the ground is lighter than swansdown, drier than sand. It falls unheard, it gives place to the foot without a sound. The birds are gone, or if not gone have hidden. The bear has made him a bed in some hollow tree or cave, and sleeps silently in the silent wood. The squirrel chatters no longer ; he, too, has retired to his little granary in some hollow trunk.

The rabbit and the weasel are still restlessly wandering about as usual, but both have changed their coats, and assumed a white covering to match the snows amongst which they live. Almost everything sleeps: trees in their robes of snow, the bear in his cave, the streams in their bonds of ice; even the winds are still. Nothing stirs.

If you have ever made a long walk at night by yourself over some lonely road or moor you may know that feeling which grows upon you, that some one is following you, that you can hear other footsteps than your own behind you. If this state of mind occurs to those who walk alone in England, where silence is really unknown and solitude impossible, where there are no mysteries (and very few, alas ! of the beauties) of nature left, you can imagine how anxiously Snap kept gazing into the forest round and behind him for the owner of that awful voice, about which there could be no mistake, which was not the mere creation of any fancy.

At last he could see the edge of the open prairie, and, breaking into a run, he gained it. It was not a wise thing to do, for if anything will encourage a wild beast to attack, it is the appearance of flight in a man. And so it was in this case. As Snap gained the open he looked back, and as he did so, saw the long snake-like figure of the mountain lion come in long bounds across the snow.

As the boy faced about, the great reddish brute paused for a moment, crouching, its belly almost on the snow, for the last rush; its ears flattened back, its yellow eyes ablaze with murder, and its white fangs

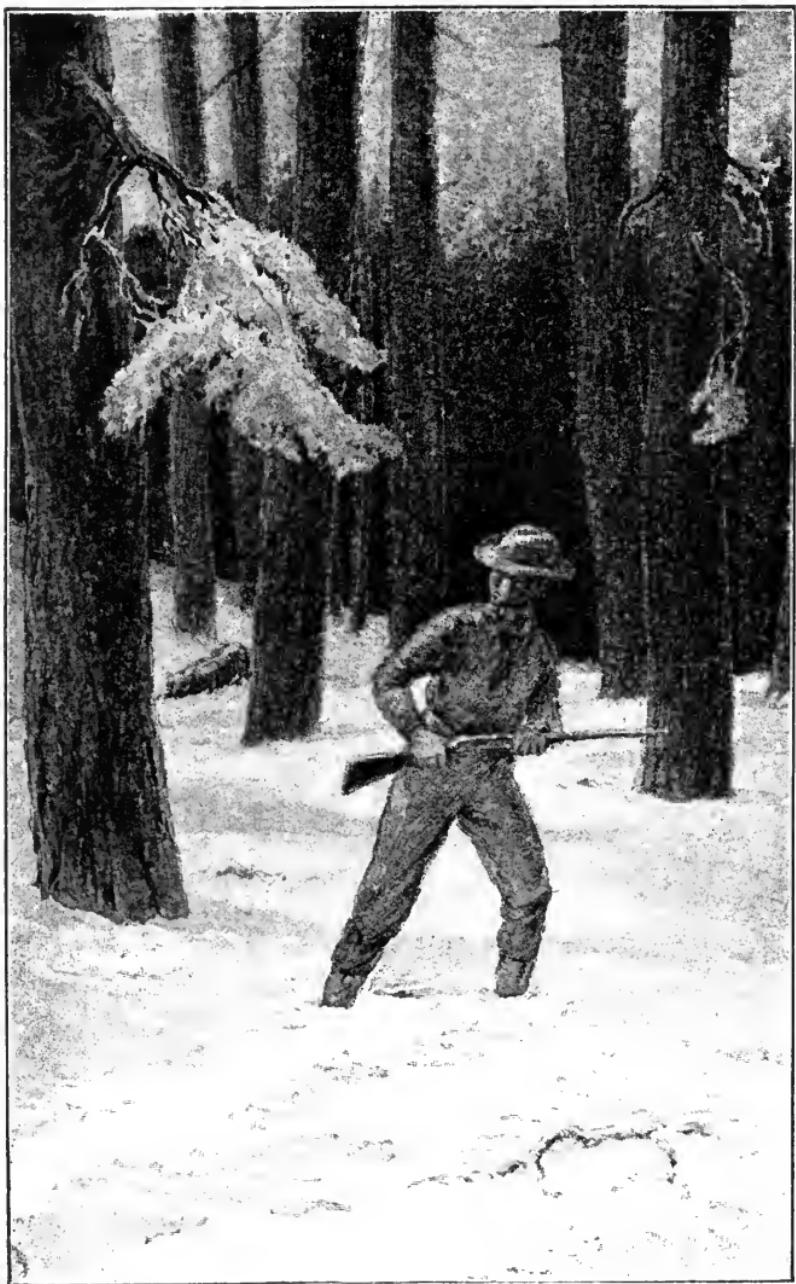
gleaming in the starlight. But a foe in the open can always be tackled and fought outright, and the flash of the good Winchester was redder than the anger in the wild beast's eyes, and the sharp, clear ring of the little rifle was a more unerring presage of death than even the scream of the mountain lion.

Over and over the great beast rolled, dyeing the snow with his blood, and Snap, standing beside him, guessed him at a good ten feet six inches from the tip of his snout to the tip of his tail.

Having skinned the panther (for in the West this animal is called indifferently mountain lion, catabount, panther, and a good many more names), Snap once more plodded homewards, utterly worn out with fatigue and excitement.

The sound of his rifle had attracted the notice of old Wharton, who now rode towards him, leading a spare pony for his use. Although there was much to tell, the two rode home almost in silence, for the spell of the night was upon them, and, besides, their whole minds were absorbed in the wonderful spectacle before them.

Suddenly great flames of rosy red had risen from behind the distant mountains, and reached like the fingers of some great hand across the heavens. The whole sky was full of the rosy light, the stars had turned white and pale. The great spokes of flame seemed to tremble with heat, like the hot air round a chimney on a day in June; then gradually they grew paler and almost died out, only to flash out again directly in brighter glory. It was the Aurora Borealis!



IN THE WOOD

CHAPTER XV

FOUNDING 'BULL PINE' FIRM

I MUST ask my readers to skip nine months or so, during which time Snap's hands were full of the varied work and sport of ranche life. It was just before the autumn round-up, and he and Nares were riding round the home ranche together. For a moment or two Nares pulled up on a bluff from which you could see far afield, and, looking out over his lands, sighed.

'I shall be sorry to leave it all,' he said, 'but I must, Snap! You did not know that I had sold the ranche?'

'Sold the ranche! No, indeed! But do you mean it?' replied Snap.

'Yes. This will be my last round-up, and I suppose I ought not to grumble. I've got to go home and look after the brewery at home. My brother's health has broken down, and I am the only other man fit for the work in the family. You know I learnt the game before I took to ranching, and, as I've made ranching pay, and sold the place and part of the herd well, I, as I said before, ought not to grumble. But,' he added after a while, 'I do. I shall leave my heart at Rosebud.'

Then they touched their horses and rode on for a while.

'Do the boys know?' asked Snap.

'No. I've told old Dick. He has known all along. I shall tell the boys, all of them, before the round-up, and of course I've made arrangements for them to stay on with the new boss if they like,' replied Nares.

'What is Dick going to do?' was the next question.

'Dick!' replied the cattle-baron; 'oh, Dick's an old fool. He says he has had one boss, but he doesn't mean to have another. He goes when I do. I think if he had any capital he would set up in a small way for himself. You see, if he takes his pay in cows, as he very likely will do, he could start from here with a little band of nearly fifty. And you, Snap, will stop on, of course?'

'I don't know. I don't think so,' replied the boy, 'I wonder—'

'Wonder! What do you wonder? What is the conundrum?' asked Nares.

'Well, just this: if Dick goes, would he take me along as a cowboy or junior partner, and would he want two more boys who would be glad to work for their grub?'

'Two more boys!' cried Nares; 'why, where are they coming from? Are you and Dick going to take all the boys off the ranche?'

'No,' answered Snap; 'but I was just going to show you this letter when you began about the sale of the ranche,' and as he said so the boy drew a very

bulky packet from his pocket. 'This,' he went on, 'I got yesterday from the two Winthrops, the fellows, you know, who came out with me and stopped at Wapiti.'

'I remember,' replied Nares; 'stopped with a premium-snatcher, didn't they? Well, I suppose they have got pretty well skinned?'

'Pretty well,' replied his companion; 'but listen. I'll not read their letter, but skim it for you. Frank writes—he, you know, was the big one. He begins by "climbing down," says I was right about not paying a premium, and all that sort of thing; then he goes on to tell his story, says that Jonathan Brown's ranche was only 360 acres, all told, and his men—"foreman, cowboys, helps, labourers, &c."—all lived under one skin, and that a black one. One nigger did everything until the Winthrops came, and when they came they were expected to share the nigger's work, food, and bed.'

'Oh, come!' cried the boss, 'I call that playing the game pretty low down! Did the Winthrops stand that?'

'Well, you see, Brown had the dollars, so what could they do?' replied Snap. 'Of course they slept on the floor by themselves, but they had to do the work. They learned to split rails and make a fence, because Brown wanted his land enclosed. They learned to "do chores" because there was no one else to do them; they helped to cut the corn, and were kept at work at hay harvest until 9.30 P.M. more than once. All this they bore unmurmuringly; but it seems old Brown tells everyone that they are his

"nevvies," that he has got them there out of charity to his sister, whose ne'er-do-weel children they are, and they don't like that; the old blackguard is always drunk, and they don't like that. There is no ranching or farming in a large way for them to learn, and they don't like that; and finally, though he has had 200*l.* premium and a year's labour out of them, he won't even now give them as much as he gives the nigger, and you bet they don't like that. So they are coming out here to look for work,' concluded Snap.

'The deuce, they are! Have they any money?' asked Nares.

'Not much, I should think; for, you see, they have thrown away their premium.'

'Well, I'll tell you what you had better do, if they are agreeable. Get old Dick to take you in as working partners. The old boy is very fond of you, and if you and the Winthrops could club together four or five hundred pounds from home, now that you have had some experience, and put it into a small lot of cattle, it might suit old Dick; and if it suited him, and this range of which he talks really exists, it would be a first-rate chance for you and your friends. I'll let you have the cattle cheap,' Nares concluded.

Snap had been looking very anxious during this conversation. Now his keen young face brightened. He saw a chance for himself and his friends.

'But don't you think such an arrangement would be rather unfair to Wharton?' he asked.

'No, not a bit,' answered Nares stoutly. 'You are a really good man about a ranche now, and those

two boys looked really likely lads, especially that big, fair-haired fellow; and then, too, Wharton has no capital worth speaking of.'

'I'll sound him anyhow, that can do no harm,' was Snap's comment; 'the boys will be here in a day or two.'

'Very well, if they are here when the round-up is going on they can lend a hand about the camp and make themselves useful, and after that you and Wharton can go with them to find this ranche.'

'Thanks,' replied Snap, and the man and boy bent from their saddles and shook hands warmly.

If Nares was going to leave the Rosebud, Snap was not going to stay. That at any rate was clear to our hero's mind. More than that—if old Wharton would only take him into his venture there was nothing that he would like better. This, too, was clear to Snap's mind.

At the first opportunity the boy sounded old Wharton on the subject. He had not to beat about the bush long.

'Why, lad,' the old fellow cried, 'that is just what I was wanting to say to you, only I thought that the life might be a bit too hard, and the profits come mighty slowly; for you know,' he added, 'we must keep putting the income into the herd for a good many years before we draw anything out for ourselves.'

'Never mind that, Dick,' replied Snap; 'can you do with my two friends?'

'Well,' the old man answered, with anything but a cheerful face, 'I don't go much on tender-feet

myself, and I don't go for to say that I make a specialty of home-reared aristocrats ; but you say as they'll work and have the dollars—I guess we mout as well try 'em.'

And so that was settled. At last, after over a year, Snap wrote home a request that 200*l.* (half of all he possessed in this world) might be put to his credit at a Chicago bank, and advised the Winthrops to do the same.

Although strongly prejudiced against tender-feet as a class, Snap's friends were lucky enough to make a very favourable impression at Rosebud from the first, for, instead of driving over in a buggy from the railway depôt, Frank and Towzer trudged in on foot, brown as berries, all their earthly goods in two small bundles which they carried on their backs, and ten dollars apiece in their pockets, earned by driving cattle up from the South, earning money by coming over two or three States on foot, instead of paying money to come on the cars.

When they first landed in America, not much more than a year before, the three lads who now stood, shaking hands and laughing, at Rosebud were fair-skinned, soft-handed lads, full of pluck, but looking to others for advice. Now they were men—hard and brown, with a quiet tone of decision in their voices, knowing how hard a dollar is to earn, and having some idea of the necessity of holding on to it when earned.

Wharton confessed that he liked the look of them, and the four set about making arrangements for their journey at once.

It seemed that years ago, when hunting in a range of mountains to the west of Rosebud, Wharton had been snowed up and obliged to winter in a certain valley which he christened Bull Pine Park, because it was surrounded by a number of Scotch firs, called 'bull pines' by the Yankees. Here, it seems, he noticed that hundreds and thousands of deer came in to winter, finding ample food and shelter in what was a sheltered basin of enormous extent, full of sweet, sun-dried, yellow grass, and protected by the shape of the land and the timber. To the old man's eye it was a type of what a range should be—a small range, that is to say—and he had kept his own counsel and waited until he had capital enough to stock his park and start on his own account. His only doubt was as to the Indians. True, he had seen none when there, or he might never have come back; but the valley was a long way from the frontier ranches, was very full of game, and on the stream which watered it he had noticed signs of what looked like a large annual fishing-camp. It was Wharton's intention, after the round-up, to revisit his valley with his three partners, to carefully reconnoitre the feeding-grounds, build a shanty, and, if possible, put up a corral, make certain about the nature and disposition of his red-skinned neighbours, and then, if all was satisfactory, return to Rosebud and drive in his cattle in the early spring.

Nares had given his old foreman leave to run his cattle and half-a-dozen of Snap's with the Rosebud herd until the spring, when the Bull Pine Firm, as Snap proudly called it, would come over to Rosebud

and drive off about one hundred and twenty beasts as the nucleus of their future herd.

During the round-up the two young Winthrops won the good opinion of everyone by their reckless riding, and still more by the songs they sang over the camp fire at night. Towzer even had a banjo, the parting present of Jumbo, Jonathan Brown's black factotum, and with this he was kept uncommonly busy all night, being excused all share in the cooking arrangements in return for his music.

'Towzer, give us old Jumbo's own song,' said Frank one night, when all the old favourites had been sung more than once.

'Which?' asked Towzer, 'Jumbo had such a varied *répertoire*.'

'Oh, the one for Saturday night, when Brown came back drunk from the dépôt. You know,' he added, turning to the rest, 'this old nigger used to amuse himself by ridiculing his "boss" in nigger melodies. Play up, Towzer.'

So adjured, Towzer twisted his face into a suitable grin, and sang:

Oh, massa! him feel sickly,
 Oh, massa 'gwine to die.

Him feel so awful empty,
 Him feel so awful dry.

Oh, den he take to whisky,
 To whisky made from rye,
It make him feel so frisky,
 It make him feel so spry.

Oh, den he chuckle fit to bust,
 An' next he almos' cry.
Dat's how de whisky's in his nose,
 De water in his eye.

'Poor old Jumbo!' added Towzer, 'unless Brown gets some more pups soon, I'm afraid he will have no time for cultivating the Muses.'

'Oh, never fear for Jumbo,' replied Nares; 'as long as there are papers to advertise in, and no way of scourging these premium-snatchers for obtaining money under false pretences, your friend Mr. Jonathan Brown will have plenty of farm-pups, and Jumbo plenty of unpaid 'helps.'

CHAPTER XVI

BEARS

THE round-up was over, and the boys had all gone to their different ranges ; Nares had left for England, and outside the ranche-house stood half-a-dozen ponies saddled and bridled, and tied up to the split-rail fence of the corral. Two more, loaded with flour-sacks, pots and pans, a sack of beans, and a side of bacon, stood with them. Amongst the ponies was the old Cradle, and beside him Dick Wharton's favourite horse. The Bull Pine Firm was just going to start on its travels, and Texan and 'the Judge,' as two of the other cowboys were called, had agreed to accompany the expedition and bring back the ponies after reaching the burnt-wood hills. Old Wharton had determined only to take ponies thus far, except for a couple of baggage-animals for which he carried feed, as by so doing the party would be able to make a short cut through a grassless and difficult mountain country.

As the party stood round, drinking a stirrup-cup to old Wharton's success, Texan was heard to remark :

' Say ! this pison's pretty strong.'

' What's the matter with the pison, Texan ? What in thunder air you grumbling at now ?' said the Judge. ' I reckon it's pretty good rye, anyways.'

'Well, pard, I ain't going to quarrel with the rye ; but I ain't drunk, am I ? There's no skim milk got into *my* boots yet, is there ?' asked Texan.

'Wal, no,' replied his friend, 'but what are you driving at ?'

'Thet's it,' replied Texan, pointing straight overhead, 'but if I didn't think that it must be the "tangle-legs" that done it, I'd say that theer were a balloon. It ain't an eagle, anyway.'

They all looked up, and sure enough far overhead was a big round bubble, as it were, floating rapidly to the north-west. There was no doubt about it. By using their glasses they could even distinguish the ear of the balloon, but even Snap's glasses (the best of the lot) could help them no further than that. They could not make out any figure in the car.

'I guess it's a runaway balloon from Chicago or St. Paul,' said Wharton, 'and lucky no one's in it, too. I wish I had the dollars that toy cost, but I reckon no one will ever catch it this side the Rockies.'

For a time they stood watching this ship of the sky drifting ever further and further from their sight, and rising, it seemed to them, ever higher and higher above the earth. At last it faded altogether from their sight, and the sky looked as calm and unruffled as if no lost bark had ever rushed through it.

'It's going our way,' said Wharton, 'pretty straight. I wonder, now, if those superstitious Johnnies one meets sometimes would call that a lucky or an unlucky omen ?'

'A deuced unlucky one,' said Snap, 'if it makes

us stand here talking and star-gazing any longer. We've got fifty miles between us and our night camp. Let's skip !'

It was a formidable little party which left the ranche that day. Of course, Snap and Wharton and the two Winthrops were armed for a winter campaign. Each carried a Winchester repeating-rifle, and old Wharton would not part with his six-shooter. The boys, not having been brought up to the use of six-shooters, wisely contented themselves with their rifles. Their two companions were also armed with rifles, intending to do a little hunting to supply the ranche with fresh meat on the way home.

For the first few miles the pack-animals were hurried along briskly, partly because everyone's spirits were too high to brook of a slower pace, and partly in order to give those cunning beasts no chance of returning to the home-ranche. In spite, however, of all precautions, and the careful arrangement of a diamond hitch by Texan, one of the ponies managed to get rid of his pack in the first mile. On starting, this animal, a sorrel, had appeared as fat as a brewer's horse, and, in spite of Texan's slaps and kicks, in spite of his knee planted firmly against its barrel, whilst both his strong hands tugged at the lash-rope, the sorrel's waist refused to contract an inch. Once he was fairly on his way, his corpulence vanished as if by magic. With both heels in the air, he shot through his drivers, plunged amongst some timber, dived under a fallen tree which lay across the path about three feet from the ground, left part of his load here—frying-pans without their handles, and

kettles with their sides squeezed in—and then with a roll, a squeal, and a final kick left pack and pack-saddle on the track, and departed homewards.

‘Guess it ain’t much good following that beast,’ said Wharton. ‘If you don’t mind, Snap, your old Cradle is about the only horse in this outfit that will carry a pack, and if you’ll let us pack the load on him you can ride my pony. I’ll tramp it.’

‘Not a bit of it, Wharton,’ replied Snap, ‘I’m the youngest. I’ll walk.’

‘Well, we’ll walk and ride in turns,’ said the old man. ‘I don’t know that there is much more fun in riding a walking horse in this timber than in tramping it yourself.’

This being arranged, the Cradle took up the load, Snap congratulating himself that by this arrangement his old favourite would go with him all the way to winter quarters.

Upon the second evening the party camped early. You soon tire of beans and bacon, especially when you can see signs of deer on all sides, and the river looks alive with fish.

At three our friends came to an excellent little prairie of half-a-dozen acres, all bright and green with grass. Round this little forest oasis stood tall bull pines, and across the river, which was within a stone’s throw of the camping-ground, the belt of burnt-wood, at which Texan and the Judge were to turn back, commenced.

‘I’ll tell you what, Dick,’ said Texan, ‘it won’t do to cross the river to-night. We’ll say good-bye right here to-morrow morning, and some of us can just run

round about and see if we can get any venison for dinner, whilst the others fix the camp. I'll do the camp-fixing myself, if you like. Who else will volunteer ?'

Of course everyone said that they would stop and fix the camp; but eventually it was arranged that Wharton and the Judge should take one beat to the west of the camp, while Snap, with young Towzer under his wing, should go towards the east; the other two staying in camp.

The youngest Winthrop begged so hard to go that Snap took compassion on him, although he would infinitely rather have gone out alone.

The course which Snap and Towzer took led them along a fair-sized stream, which joined the main river not far from camp. Towzer had on his first pair of mocassins, and, as the forest was open and the boy light, he made very little noise as he went. Now and then, though, you might have seen him flinch and almost come down with an expression of agony upon his face. He had not yet learnt to feel with his feet, as it were, before putting them down, and had suddenly thrown all his weight on some sharp-pointed snag of dead wood, or merciless flint, which reminded him that an English shooting-boot, although noisy, has its advantages.

Stooping down by the river, Snap looked long and fixedly at a track.

'The cattle have been along here, haven't they, Snap ?' asked Towzer. 'Whose cattle would *they* be ?'

'Cattle don't eat fish, as a rule, Towzer,' replied

Snap in a whisper, for some of the tracks were pretty fresh; ‘and look here, the beasts which made these tracks picked these bones,’ and, so saying, he held up the backbone of a large salmon, picked as clean as if it had been prepared as an anatomical specimen.

All along the bank of the stream a regular road was beaten down, one track on another, until at last all was so confused and level that Towzer’s mistake was an easy one to make. But on one side of the main path Snap had been able to distinguish a few distinct and separate tracks, and it was as he looked up from one of these that he said:

‘No, these aren’t cattle, young ’un; these are bears, and a rare big gang of them, too.’

Towzer’s first expression of delight rather faded away as he looked behind and round him, where the great bull pines stood grey and silent on all sides, and the further you peered into them the darker looked the gloom of the forest. It was not a pleasant idea that the gloomy, quiet forest might be full of unseen grizzlies.

‘Are they grizzlies, do you think, Snap?’ asked the boy.

‘Can’t say for certain,’ replied that now experienced hunter, ‘but I expect there are some of all sorts about. You see the river is full of salmon, which have run up to spawn, and the bears are down here for the fishing season.’

Leaving the river, Snap and his friend crossed two or three deep dingles, or, as they would call them in America, little canyons, and in half an hour’s time were creeping very cautiously along the brow of a ridge

through the big trees, on which the light of the sun gleamed redly. That sun was now low in the skies, and every moment Snap expected to catch sight of a stately stag tossing his head and leading his hinds in single file from the timber to the feeding-grounds.

'Halloo,' whispered he, suddenly holding up his hand as a sign for silence to Towzer, 'what is the matter with the robber-birds ?'

Towzer listened. A lot of birds just over the ridge were chattering noisily, like jays in an English covert when the beaters are coming through. Snap signed to the boy to follow, and both crept cautiously to the top of the ridge.

On the very top was a kind of table-land, and, looking through the trees with their backs to the sun, neither of our friends could see anything. Creeping back again, Snap ran along the hill and came up to the top of the ridge again in such a position as to have the noisy jays between himself and the sinking sun. For a moment he could still see nothing. Then a stick cracked under his companion's foot, and the quick movement of a dark mass in amongst the pines caught and arrested his attention. He had never seen a grizzly before, but he needed no one to tell him what the great brute was before him, with its whole body on the alert to detect the source of the sound it had heard.

The sun threw a red glow on the scene, which looked like blood about the body of the deer on which the grizzly was feeding. The brute had his claws on his victim's shoulder, from which he was tearing strips of flesh as he lay muttering and growling by

its side. As the twig cracked he rose and sat looking over his shoulder in the direction from which the sound came.

Snap remembered old Wharton's words as he looked at the bear : 'Thet's about his favourite position when he once glimpses you, and don't know whether to come or go ; but don't you shoot then, there's nothing to hit but his jaw or his shoulder, and you won't kill him quick enough to be safe that way.' Remembering these words, Snap kept his hand off his rifle and waited until the bear should give him a better chance ; but before this happened there was a report, which deafened our hero, right by his ear ; the bear spun round with a roar, and then stood tearing at the ground and tossing the earth in the air in a paroxysm of rage.

Snap hardly dared to breathe, but if his words were inaudible his lips seemed to say to the reckless youngster beside him, 'Keep still for your life, he may not see you.'

Neither of the boys was well hidden—in fact, Snap was not hidden at all ; but by remaining rigid, as if he was cut out of stone, the short-sighted beast did not distinguish him from the pines around him. Luckily, too, he did not notice the smoke curling from Towzer's rifle.

To the boys the bear was plain enough with his back to the sunlight ; but they themselves were in shadow.

'Good heavens, there's another !' cried Towzer, in a whisper so audible that the huge, shaggy beast which the unfortunate boy had wounded dropped on

all fours and came a dozen yards towards them, stopping again with his sharp, fierce snout in the air, trying to catch the wind of his unseen enemies.

At that moment Snap gave all up as lost, for not only had he seen the bear which had drawn the exclamation from Towzer, but he had seen two other great grey forms amongst the timber on his right. Gripping the boy's arm with nervous hand, he drew him down beside him :

'Towzer, is there any tree on your left that you could get up in less than ten seconds to save your life?'

Snap's white-drawn face showed that he was in earnest, and Towzer looked desperately round. Like Snap, he had spent many a half-holiday at Fernhall birds'-nesting, and with climbing-irons to help him there were very few trees which he could not have climbed in time ; but to climb a tree in ten seconds for your life is quite another matter.

'There, there's the best,' cried Snap out loud, pointing to a young bull pine with a lot of short stumps of branches not far from the ground. Of course, they might break off, and then it would be only a bare pole to swarm ; but it was the smallest tree, and the best chance, for all that.

'Now run,' shouted Snap, 'run for your life, and don't look back,' and as he spoke he pushed the boy from him and jumped up.

With a roar that sounded like a curse, it was so human in its rage, the bear saw both boys, and half turned towards the running figure. In that moment Snap's rifle rang out and the bear rolled over.

He knew, without looking, that the others had seen

him ; and one was charging straight at him, while with low, angry growls the other two had trotted into the open. A glance showed him Towzer halfway up his tree. And yet all this was seen at once without an effort, whilst all his strength and attention was devoted to pumping up another cartridge into his Winchester repeater.

There is only one fault in these excellent weapons, and that is a terrible one. In some of the old-fashioned commoner rifles of this sort the cartridges occasionally get jammed. This had happened now to Snap. His rifle had jammed, the empty cartridge would not come out, and there he stood defenceless with a charging bear almost on the top of him.

Grasping the barrel with both hands, he had just time to hurl the useless weapon with all his strength at the head of the grizzly and spring to one side. He had a glimpse of a devilish head, with ears laid back, and fiery eyes, and long white fangs gleaming from a shaggy mass of grey fur, going over him at railroad speed. Instinctively he had rolled away as he fell, as a rider rolls from a fallen horse, and the pace of the bear's charge and the downward slope of the ground had taken the heavy beast past the prostrate boy.

In a moment Snap was on his legs again, and, dodging behind the first tree he came to, he scrambled up it.

' Hurry, Snap, hurry ! ' shrieked Towzer in a voice of agony, and just as our hero drew up his foot he heard a snort almost against his heel, and a tearing sound as a great flake of bark was torn from the stem of the pine by the claws of the bear.

It was a sight to make any man's flesh creep which met the boy's eyes when he looked down from a point of safety some twenty feet up the pine. Reared on end, his huge claws stretching upwards, his red jaws open, muttering and moaning after the prey which had escaped him, one of the bears leaned against the pine to which Snap clung. Two others, growling from time to time, prowled round and round the foot of the tree, and in the middle of the little plateau the wounded bear kept up a succession of moans and growls as it struggled to its feet and fell back again time after time, dying, but bent on vengeance still.

Towzer was safe in his tree. Snap's rifle lay broken on the ground, and Towzer's with a dozen undischarged cartridges in it lay not far from the wounded bear. 'Ah!' Snap thought, 'if I only had that here!' Towzer, of course, in his desperate flight had thrown away his arms. Even had he had a sling to his rifle it would hardly have been possible to climb with it, and without a sling, and with a grizzly's teeth and claws behind, Towzer did well to drop his weapon and trust to speed and Snap's self-devotion.

'Snap,' Towzer called from his tree, 'I don't think much of this. I can't hold on very long. Are those brutes likely to wait long?'

'All night, I should think,' replied Snap.

This seemed too much for Winthrop, and a silence ensued; the boys clinging desperately to their uncomfortable perches, and the bears prowling up and down like sentries on their beat.

This went on for nearly an hour, and there was no change, and seemed likely to be none. The sun's last red glow was on the forest floor; the uncertain light made the great grey forms which went so silently backwards and forwards look even more horrible and monstrous to the eyes of their hapless victims, but two at any rate of the three were still on guard.

'Let's try a shout for help,' said Towzer; 'all together, Snap!'

'Coo-èy! coo-èy!' cried the boys, and as they cried the great grey forms paused in their silent walk, and sent a chorus of hollow growls to swell the sound. Other growls from the forest shadows, too, told the boys that, though they could only see the wounded bear and another, the others were not far off.

By-and-by the moon rose, and a silver light showed the scene in new and horrible distinctness. The one bear was dead. Stark and stiff he lay by his last victim, and silver light and ebon shadow were distributed evenly over the bodies of bear and stag, murderer and murdered.

A breaking bough and a quick scraping sound broke the silence.

'By Jove, that was a shave!' panted Towzer's young voice.

'What are you at, you little idiot?' cried Snap.

'Jolly nearly fell out of this tree,' replied the boy.

'Went to sleep, I suppose?' said Snap in a tone of disgust.

'I don't know about that,' said Towzer, in a piteous tone, 'but I cannot hold on to these clothes-pegs much longer.'

The clothes-pegs were the short stumps of boughs to which the boy had been clinging.

'Snap, couldn't we make a fight of it? I want my supper,' added Towzer, 'and there's only one bear now.'

'How are we to fight? I've got no rifle, and without that you are more likely to satisfy the bear's appetite than your own,' replied Snap.

'Well, I'll tell you what,' said the reckless youngster, 'I can't stay up here all night if you can, and, if you are game to come down and try for that rifle, I am.'

'How do you mean? The bear would get you before you could get to it. Look at him watching you now. Nice, pleasant face for a photograph, hasn't he?' added Snap.

In spite of the danger and the eeriness of the whole thing, Towzer laughed as he saw the great brute sitting half upright on its hams, its ears cocked sharply up to listen.

'I don't suppose the old brute will understand English,' said Towzer, 'so look here! My tree is an easy one to get up. I can almost swing myself out of a bear's reach from the ground. If you will be ready I'll come down and draw the brute after me. Whilst he hunts me to my tree you dash in and get my rifle. If you are quick and lucky you'll get back before he twigs you. Why, it will be just like prisoner's base, when we were first-form boys at the Dame's school.'

'Yes,' muttered Snap, 'with our lives for forfeit if we are caught! Well, all right, Towzer,' he cried aloud, 'are you sure you can get back safely?'

'Yes, never mind me,' sang out Towzer; 'look here!'

And, sliding down, the boy just touched the ground, and as the bear rose swung himself back again, chuckling, 'Don't you wish you may get it?'

'All right, then, if you have made up your mind let us do it now; give me a moment to slide down close to the ground,' shouted Snap; 'keep the bear looking at you for a moment.'

'All right,' answered the young 'un, rattling about amongst the bushes with his leg as he hung from the lowest bough of his tree.

The bear was up, and coming slowly towards Towzer, growling horribly. The boy's blood ran cold, but he had given his word to Snap, and he did not mean to go back.

'Now!' shouted Snap.

At the cry the bear turned round towards Snap, and as he did so Towzer dropped to the ground and ran forward into the open with a shout.

For a moment the bear hesitated, then, with a roar that shook the pines, dashed at him. Towzer turned, and never in all his life, not even when he made his celebrated 'run-in' for the school-house with the football under his arm, did he go so fast or dodge so nimbly as he did that night.

As Towzer turned, Snap's lithe figure slipped noiselessly through the moonlight, and, not daring to look at anything else, dashed straight at the rifle.

Did the dead bear move, or was it only fancy? Fancy, surely! And now he had his hand on the rifle and turned to see a ghastly sight. Towzer

stretched up at his bough and missed it. The bear was just behind, there was no time for another effort, and the boy was driven past his one chance of safety. Catching at the trunk of a big bull pine, Towzer swung round it, dodged the bear, and once more tried for his tree. This time he reached the bough, but even then, blown as he was, the bear must have reached and pulled him down, had not a ball from Snap's rifle broken the brute's spine as he reared up on end to make his attack.

Utterly spent, Towzer dropped back beside the bear and staggered across to where Snap still lay, his rifle resting on the body of the first bear, from behind which he had just fired. Together the boys sat and looked at one another, too shaken and tired to speak.

At last, Towzer, looking anxiously round, said, 'Those others won't come back, will they ?'

'I don't know ; if they do, I hope they will put us out of our misery quickly. I didn't know that I had any nerves before, but they are jumping like peas in a frying-pan to-night. Let's go.'

And very cautiously they went, creeping through the dim aisles of the forest, starting at every sound, and far more frightened at the meeting than was even the big stag which met them face to face just before they got clear of the timber. They never even thought of firing at him, although he was so fair a shot, and his great sides shook with inches of fat, until the camp-fire shone through the trees, and then it was too late to remember that they had gone out for venison and come back without any.

'Well, Towzer, I suppose we must put up with

beans and bacon again to-night—unless,’ with a grin, ‘you’d care to go down and catch us a salmon, or fetch a steak from the dead stag up there,’ said Snap, pointing back over his shoulder.

But Towzer had had enough sport for one day, and did not volunteer ; and, indeed, it was not necessary, for the others had killed a hind, and the boys told their story in short, broken sentences, with a savoury rib in one hand and a pannikin of tea in the other. They almost thought bear-shooting good sport by the time they had finished supper.

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE BRÛLÉ

THAT was a very beautiful camp and a merry night, that last night with the cowboys from Rosebud. The fire they had made was what they called a nor'-wester. Timber was plentiful—to be had, indeed, for the felling—and the men left in camp had found it better fun to swing an axe than to do nothing. So whole trees lay across the fire, and huge tongues of flame kept leaping out and shooting into the darkness. Every now and then a log broke, and the ends fell in with a crash, the flames roared more fiercely than ever, and a shower of red sparks went away on the wind.

The men left in camp, being in a luxurious mood and having lots of time on their hands, had run up a shelter of boughs—two great props and a crosspiece, with a lot of underbrush sloping from this ridge-pole to the ground. Under this, with their feet to the fire, lay the men smoking.

‘Wal, Dick,’ said the Judge, ‘I reckon I don’t owe you no grudge. You’ve been a good pal to us, and I hope, mate, you’ll strike it rich where you’re a-goin’.’

‘Them’s my sentiments to a dot,’ said Texan, ‘and if those boys of yourn don’t get their har raised

by grizzly or Injun before they're six months older, I shouldn't be much surprised if you made cowboys of them.'

'Thank you, Texan, old chap,' laughed Snap. 'If you don't do any more mining amongst those gopher-holes before I come back, I'll bet you my best saddle that the Cradle and I lick your head off at any distance you like on old "Springheels."'

The laugh, for a moment, went against Texan, for in the round-up just over it was commonly stated as a fact that, whilst riding at full pace down a hill after cattle, his pony had put its foot in one gopher-hole and shot its owner into another, from which, five minutes later, he was extracted by a comrade, who said that he had found Texan 'growing anyhow, just planted root up'ards in a gopher-hole!'

'There's one thing agin you, Dick, and that's the weather,' remarked the Judge; 'for all it's so fine now, I don't half like that fringe round the moon.'

'No, it does look watery, doesn't it?' said old Dick, looking up; 'but, hang it all, don't let us croak. Hand me another of those fish, Snap, if you can spare one. Bust me! if you don't eat half-pound trout as if they was shrimps,' he added.

'There's summat I'm thinking,' said Texan after a pause, 'that's worse nor weather. I don't want to croak, Dick, but air you sure about them Injuns? I kem acrost their fishing-camp to-day, and there isn't a soul in it. Do you calculate as they're on the war-path?'

'Not they!' replied Dick; 'a Crow won't face a Blackfoot nowadays, and, unless they're stealing

horses or killing cattle, they aren't doing any harm, you bet.'

'How!'

It was a sound between a human voice and a dog's bark, sharp, hoarse, and guttural, and it appeared to proceed from the ground under Snap's seat. Snap was round as if a wasp had stung him. There had been no sound behind the camp-fire; no dry twig had cracked, no leaf rustled; and yet there was this sudden 'How!' and behind Snap stood, stiff and silent, a tall, grim-looking Redskin.

A sort of pointed hat of rush was on his head, through the band of which an eagle's plume had been stuck; round his shoulders was a bright-coloured blanket, and wide trousers of deer-skin, with long fringes of the same down the seams, reached to his ankles.

'Not a beauty,' Snap thought, and he moved a little uneasily away from the stranger, who stood quietly staring at the group.

The Indian was certainly not a beauty, even for an Indian. His hair was sleek and black—'snaky' Towzer called it. His eyes were small and set close together in a big bull-like head, and he was hare-lipped. His face, too, was full of lines and wrinkles. He was as old as the hills apparently, but old as the oaks grow old—strong and rugged, and nowhere near being worn out.

'How!'- said Dick, and he rose and gave the chief his hand, and offered him a seat on his blanket, which he took.

'Do you speak English?' asked Snap as the

Indian sat beside him, but the only answer he got was a stony stare.

'I guess he does, for all that,' whispered Texan; 'these beggars never let on how much they know. Say, Dick, you talk their lingo; ask him where he comes from.'

So adjured, old Dick Wharton supplied his guest with fish, bread, and tea, all of which he took without a word, and then Dick began to question him.

The Indians had broken up their fishing-camp, the Redskin said; their medicine-man had advised them to. Oh, yes, it was a good season, and there were lots of fish there yet, but the medicine-man had seen a bird, and the tribe could not stay any longer.

'Seen a bird!' cried old Wharton; 'well, I reckon he sees a good many birds in a day; but what kind of a bird was this to frighten the whole tribe from fishing and gambling?'

'The tribe was not frightened, O white-skin,' replied the Indian with dignity; 'but they knew that the bird which Teeveevex saw was the bird of doom, which preys on the tribes of men, and the Crows have hidden until the danger is passed.'

'But what sort of a bird is the bird of doom?' persisted Wharton.

'Only Teeveevex has seen it,' replied the chief, 'but its white wings are as the clouds which contain the rain-storms, and it rushes through the sky like a star falling from its throne.'

'Bunkum!' muttered Texan, and, low as he muttered it, a spark seemed suddenly to kindle and as

suddenly to die out in the watchful eye of the savage. ‘I’ll bet the Blackfeet are going to have a lively time of it, unless they’re going to do a bit of horse-stealing at Rosebud.’

‘What is the name by which the braves call you?’ asked Wharton.

‘The men call me the Great White Rabbit,’ replied the chief proudly.

‘Not a bad name either for a hare-lipped one,’ muttered Frank.

The Indian could not have understood what was meant, but he saw the smile, and gave Frank one of his ugly looks.

That sturdy young Englishman stared coolly at him, remarking to Snap, ‘It’s an engaging young thing when it’s pleased, isn’t it, Snap? And, oh Lord, what a mouth for a fish dinner!’ he added as the savage filled up the vacuum between his jaws with about half a pound of trout.

‘Ask him how old he is,’ said Snap, and Wharton repeated the question.

The chief thought for a moment, and then held up five fingers solemnly.

‘Oh, you be hanged!’ cried Towzer. ‘Why, the beggar’s laughing at us. A nice, tender, five-year-old you are, aren’t you, my beauty?’ And the boys laughed in concert.

‘He is right enough, though,’ said Wharton; ‘with these chaps each finger stands for ten, and I don’t suppose that he is more than fifty.’

After eating everything which the whites had left, and begging for a charge or two of powder, the cow-

boys' visitor got up and left without a word either of thanks or adieu.

'Well,' said Towzer, 'that twopence which I presume our friend's mamma, Mrs. Doe Rabbit, spent on her son's manners doesn't appear to have been a good investment.'

'Lord bless you, you don't expect thanks from an Injun, do you?' remarked Wharton; 'like enough that chap will put a ball in you if he gets a chance, and I should be very much surprised if either of your grizzlies has its hide on to-morrow. If it has, old Buck Rabbit, or whatever he calls himself, won't be to blame, you bet!'

And sure enough, when Snap and Texan went up next morn (rather late, it is true), both bear-skins had gone, and the place, so Texan said, 'stunk of Injuns.'

When Snap and Texan 'got back without their bear-skins old Wharton had the ponies packed, and 'the Judge' had made all preparations for a start.

'So Buck Rabbit got those skins, did he?' asked Wharton. 'Well, I'll forgive him, whatever Snap says, if that's all the hair he raises this fall.'

'Yes, you may say that,' Texan added grimly. 'I've been here some while now, but I never knowed those Crows give up their summer gamble, and bust me if I think they'll feel inclined to lie idle now that they have been skeered out of their fishing-camp.'

'That being so,' said Dick, 'it seems to me you mout as well lead them off our trail a bit. Don't let them sight you between this and Rosebud, and maybe, if Buck Rabbit didn't count the horses, he'll think,

when he sees the trail of all them ponies, that we've all gone back to Rosebud.'

'And how about Rosebud, Dick?' asked Texan.

'Oh, I reckon Rosebud can look after itself, leastways it could when I was theer,' replied the old foreman; and Texan and the Judge nodded approvingly, and murmured with emphasis 'You bet!'

'Then you'll be back in spring for the cows?' asked Texan.

'Well, we'll do our possible,' replied Wharton, busy with the Cradle's lash-rope; 'if we don't turn up you'll understand that we're wiped out, and "the boys" can divide my band amongst 'em.'

'The boys won't none of 'em hanker after their share of that band, Dick,' replied Texan, shaking the old man's hand. 'Good luck to you!'

'So long!' cried the Judge. 'Keep your eyes skinned at night, pard!'

And with the bell of the leading pack-animal tinkling merrily the two boys, and all the ponies save the Cradle and another, disappeared among the trees on the back track.

Dick and the boys stood looking along the trail for some time after their friends were out of sight. Now and again they could hear the bell or a cry from Texan or the Judge to one of the self-willed ponies, but by degrees they passed out of earshot as out of sight.

'I guess we'd better tramp,' said Dick, turning to the three young Englishmen, over whom a certain sense of loneliness had been stealing.

For the first time they realised what this adven-

ture meant. They saw now that for the next four months at any rate they were entirely dependent upon their own efforts for all the necessaries of life. They were only four men, armed and strong, it is true, isolated among the great things of Nature—mountains and forests, and by-and-by ice and snow and tempest—and cut off from railways and the civilised world, and bound to die if they could not find food and make shelter for themselves. Old Dick, used all his life to depend on his own right hand for everything he wanted, probably only felt a bit of a wrench at parting from his old comrades and saying good-bye to his old position of foreman.

The boys felt a good deal more than that. Those two rough-riders, driving their string of pack ponies before them, were to them the world, or at any rate their last glimpse of it.

'You had better lead "the Cradle," Snap,' cried Wharton, 'but I reckon we'll all have to swim at the ford. Your friends can swim, I suppose?'

'Like fish, Dick,' replied Frank for himself and brother.

'Come on, then,' said the old man, and with a long, swinging stride the four started on their hundred-mile walk.

All four were in mocassins, flannel shirts, and pants of blue jean. On their heads they wore the usual cowboy hat, a wide light-coloured sombrero. Snap carried his rifle, as the best shot of the party, but the others had tied their rifles with their coats and blankets on the pack-animals' backs.

The river when they reached it was not as full as

Wharton had expected, still for a few paces in the middle horses and men had to swim.

As they stood shaking themselves on the further bank, Towzer looked ruefully at his own draggled appearance and remarked :

' I believe I've got my stockings wet ! Don't you think, Frank, mother would like us to change them ? '

There was a laugh among the boys, and then as they tramped through the grimy, burnt forest, with its charred stumps and black, leafless branches, their thoughts went back to Fairbury.

The thought acted on the different natures differently. Towzer felt inclined to sit down and cry, and, as that would not do at any price, he began to whistle an old nigger-minstrel melody. A hard, dogged expression came into Frank's face. He would rather have been squire of Fairbury, but he meant to do his duty here all the same. And Snap ! well, Snap's eyes lit up, and his head was very high in the air. He didn't know that he was leading a pack pony, and that old Wharton was wondering why the boy's eyes looked so bright and moist. Snap didn't see the grey old forest, or think of the years of daily labour, but he saw a bright picture with two sides to it : on the one a wide stretch of country dotted everywhere with cattle which bore his brand, and on the other the steps of the old hall at Fairbury, and the Winthrops, dear old Admiral Chris, and the little mother ; Fairbury had been bought back, and that sweet, grey-haired woman had her hand in his, and was saying, ' I trusted you, Snap, all along ; I knew my brown boy would go straight.'

Well, it was a dream, and Snap an optimist and a bit of a poet, and perhaps in nine cases out of ten such dreams only lead to disappointment; but if you are prepared to meet with disappointment, a beautiful dream is no bad thing to beguile a long march.

The country through which the boys were now travelling was as desolate and uncanny as anything which the world can show. They were crossing a belt of forest between the forks of a great stream, one arm of which they crossed in the morning. Between the two streams a great fire had raged some years ago, and range after range of rolling hills lay before them covered with tall trees charred to a cinder, yet standing upright still—grey, unburied skeletons of the past. In some places a tree which had once been nearly two hundred feet in height still reared a great grey spire towards heaven, and yet a few yards from the ground you could see that fire and weather between them had eaten the trunk almost through, so that its balance alone seemed to keep it upright. All through the brûlé, as this burnt forest is called, the trails are blocked by fallen timber. At every breeze a score of them come crashing down, and hardly a minute goes by without a snap like a rifle-shot to remind you that it is merely by an interposition of Providence that each of the great pines along your path has not fallen upon you as you passed. The difficulty of getting pack animals through a forest of this kind is considerable, although they will jump and crawl like cats; and the walking is weary work even for the strongest man, where at one moment you have to balance along the stem of a fallen pine, or climb over a log ten feet high,

and the next have your pants caught by the point of a sharp rampike which tears them to shreds and perhaps takes a foot or two of skin with it.

'I am afraid Texan was right,' said Dick as they plodded along, while the sun was setting slowly in the west, 'those clouds are coming up uncommon fast, and it's main dark for three o'clock.'

Winthrop was leading 'the Cradle,' and Towzer was walking alongside of him, and when Dick spoke he spoke to Snap, who had fallen a bit behind.

'Don't you agree, Snap?' he said after a pause, and as no answer came he looked round.

'Hulloh! Why, where in thunder have you got to?' he cried. 'Here! hold on there in front. Where's Snap?'

The boys pulled up and looked round. Not five minutes before they had seen him; now, though they could see plainly amongst the grey, bare poles, there was no sign of him.

'Snap! hi, Snap!' they cried; and faint and far away an echo seemed to say 'halloa.'

'Was that an answer?' said Dick; 'here, dang your skin, hold up there,' he added, giving 'the Cradle' an angry dig in the ribs, to induce that animal to stop pawing the ground and snorting.

'Now shout agin, Frank, and mebbe this brute will let us hear if he answers.'

'Snap! halloa, halloa there, Snap!' cried Frank, and again from far away came an answering halloa, very feeble and faint, but still recognisable as Snap's voice.

'Why, he's underground,' said Towzer.

'Yes, I reckon he is,' said Dick; 'I hope he ain't much hurt.'

'Why, do you know where he is?' asked both boys.

'Not exactly, but if you'll give me thet lash-rope we'll, maybe, find him pretty soon. It's lucky we missed him so soon,' he added.

Turning back, the old man walked along the trail, calling Snap by name from time to time, the answer getting plainer as he advanced, but still proceeding apparently from somewhere under their feet.

'Here he is,' remarked Wharton at last, 'and a pretty dark hole it is, too. Are you hurt any, Snap?' he inquired, leaning over a log and looking down on the other side.

'No, I'm all right,' said the voice, 'but I can't get out.'

'Lay hold of that,' replied Wharton, lowering the rope, 'and we'll pretty soon haul you out.'

When the Winthrops came up this was what met their gaze. The whole floor of the forest was composed of fallen trees and dead logs, in most cases overgrown with moss and bushes, which in their turn had been burnt or scorched. For centuries the trees had grown and fallen, rotted or refused to rot, and over them the fresh forest had grown, until in many cases they formed a solid soil of rotted wood and débris. Here and there, however, where a few great trees had fallen and had not yet rotted, a thin crust, as it were, of boughs and soil and débris had formed above, and through such a crust as this Snap had tumbled into what Towzer called the basement of the

forest, a dark, damp, underground hollow, in which in places you could travel upright for thirty or forty yards under a bridge of fallen timber. Out of a place of this kind Snap was hauled, very black and grimy, and as hoarse as a crow with shouting, but otherwise unhurt.

'We had better push on at once,' said Wharton as soon as he was sure that his friend was unhurt. 'I don't like the look of the evening a bit, and should be thankful if we could get under the lee of some big boulders I know of, a few miles further on, before the storm breaks.'

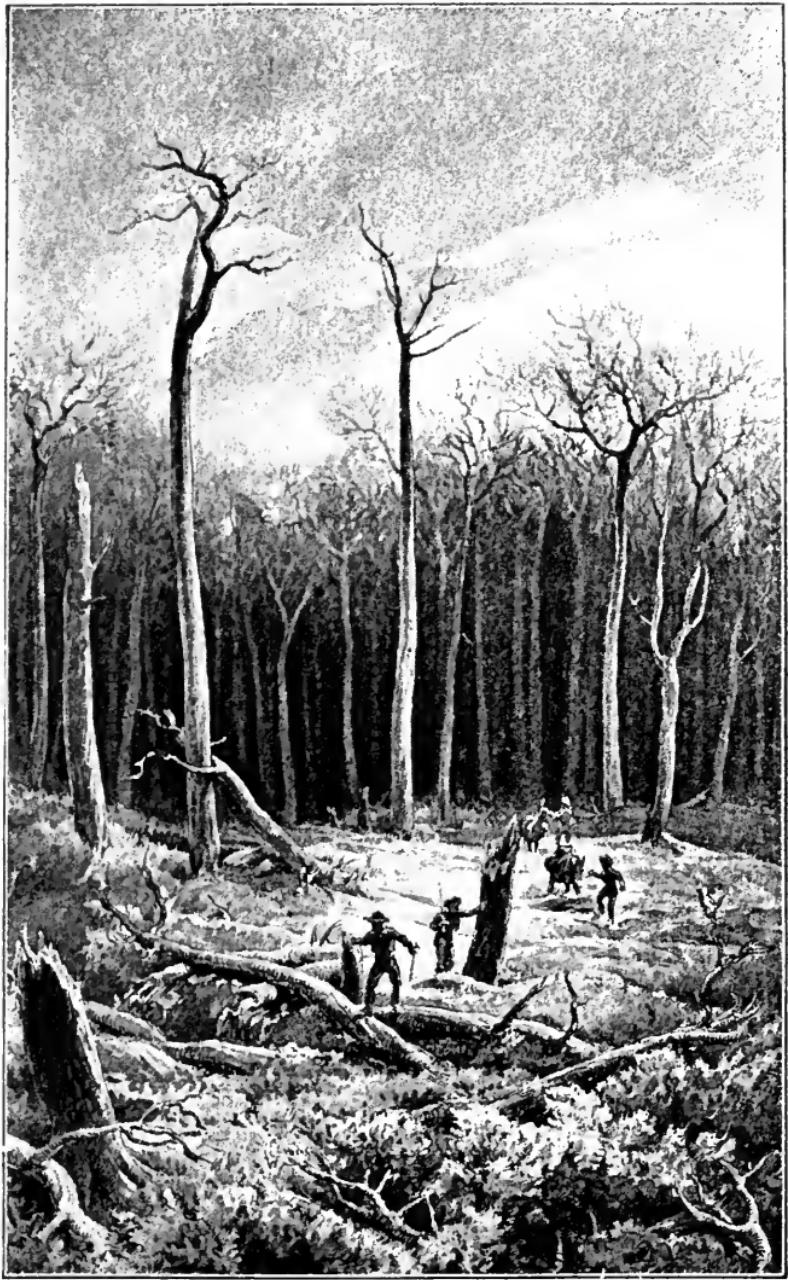
'It does look bad, doesn't it?' said Frank; 'however, a little rain would do no harm, as we shall not strike water to-night, and we all want a wash badly, specially Snap.'

'If this storm catches us in the brûlé, we shan't want washing any more,' was Dick's gloomy reply; and, though the sky—covered with long fleecy storm-clouds, and full of an angry yellow light—did not look reassuring, the boys all thought that for once Dick was taking an unnecessarily black view of their chances.

The boys were still digesting Dick's last speech when there came a tiny whisper through the trees. It was not anything more. Just a faint little wind like a sigh; and yet three or four great trees, which had kept their balance for years, came down before it with a crash which made even Dick's cheek blanch,

'Caught, by thunder!' cried he. 'Boys, we've only one chance; leave them ponies and follow me.'

Not understanding the danger, the boys could not



IN THE BRÛLÉ



help seeing that it was real, by the old man's manner, and the speed with which he darted back along the trail. As he passed 'Cradle,' Snap noticed that that intelligent beast turned of his own accord and followed his human companions. As they ran, another faint wind came, and another half-dozen great trees thundered down, and one of them right across the path between Dick and his friends. One of its boughs flew up and struck Frank across the face, leaving a long black mark and drawing a bright stream of blood.

For a moment the boys recoiled aghast; but Wharton's voice woke them to a fresh effort.

'Run, run, tear and ages! *will* you run?' he shrieked, and one after another the boys scrambled over the carcase of the great tree and reached Dick's side.

Dick was on his knees beside the hole from which he had extricated Snap. The good old fellow, though he knew the danger, meant to see everyone else safe before he thought of himself.

'Here, young 'un,' he cried to Towzer, 'get hold of my fist. Now then, down you go,' and he lowered the boy as far as he could into the hole.

'Let go and drop,' he cried. 'Are you all right?' he added.

'All right,' said Towzer's voice from somewhere beneath their feet.

'Now then, Frank,' said Dick; and one after another he let the boys down, and a moment after dropped down amongst them.

'Great Scott! how it shakes the wind out of you,'

he muttered, picking himself up, ‘I didn’t know it was so far.’

Just then a peal of thunder drowned their voices, and after it came the rain in torrents, driven by a perfect gale of wind. Even where the boys were the rain came in bucketfuls, and the red lightning lit up their subterranean shelter until they could see the black logs above their heads, like the gigantic beams in some old English hall. But the loud thunder echoing amongst the cliffs beyond the river, and the hissing rain, and every other sound was drowned when the wind arose, for after the first rush of the wind it seemed as if the end of the world had come, or as if, at the very least, some great battle like Hohenlinden was being fought right over their heads. Tree after tree came crashing to the ground and, as it fell, dragged down others with it. Now they would fall one after another with loud reports as if a regiment of giants were file-firing, and again a great wave of sound, a very volley of the heaviest artillery, would make the ground rock with its awful roar.

‘Thank God, we got here in time,’ said old Dick reverently; ‘I guess there won’t be a tree standing when this storm stops, and those poor wretched ponies will be pounded small enough for sausage meat!’

‘Do you think they can’t escape, Dick?’ asked Frank; ‘our rifles won’t be good for much, then.’

‘No,’ replied Wharton, ‘except, maybe, for old iron or chips to light a fire with. By the way, who has the matches?’

‘They are on the packs,’ said Towzer.

'What, haven't any of you a match about you?' asked Dick.

'No, I haven't,' said Frank.

'Nor I,' added Towzer.

'Haven't you, Snap?' asked Dick. 'What are you thinking of, boy?' Dick added.

'No, I haven't a match, Dick. I was thinking what a cur I was to leave poor old Cradle, and how piteous he looked as I passed him; but I had no notion what I was leaving him to,' replied Snap sadly.

'Yes, it is a pity. He was a good horse, but there are plenty better, and, besides, we hadn't a rope strong enough to lower him into this hole, even if we had had time to try it; and then I'm not sure as he'd have let us do it,' said Wharton; adding, after a while, 'I guess the storm is stopping, but it's a poor camp we shall have to-night, without a fire.'

Before long the storm stopped; our friends down below could feel that the air was fresh and sweet, and that the evening sun was shining brightly over everything. By tying a little log on to the lash-rope and throwing it over one of the beams which formed the roof of their shelter, our friends made themselves a ladder, and one by one climbed up from the darkness to daylight again.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LOSS OF 'THE CRADLE'

WHEN they did so, what a change had taken place! An hour and a half ago thousands of burnt trees, stretched upon all sides, blocked the view and formed a forest of skeletons. Now every high head was levelled, every tall grey spire laid low. Like a wheat-field beaten down in autumn lay the burnt forest, but, unlike that, no sun could ever raise it up again. When years should have passed and the dead trees returned to earth, another forest would spring up where the pines had stood—not a forest of bright larch and tall pines, but, oddly enough, a forest utterly alien to the one which had so long covered the ground. Beech and birch, and maple or poplar, would grow green in spring and shed their leaves in autumn where the winds once whistled and the snows lay amongst the great evergreens.

As Snap looked at the levelled forest the words came somehow to his lips, 'This is the Lord's doing; and it is marvellous in our eyes.' Lifting his hat, he looked up to the bright sun, and even the grim old cowboy was not ashamed to follow his example.

Picking their way with difficulty among the chaos

of fallen trees, the boys' ears were greeted by a low whinny.

'It's the Cradle, poor old chap!' cried Snap. 'Can it possibly be that he is alive?'

'It's a pity if he is, my lad,' said old Wharton, 'for he'll only be calling you to shoot him out of his pain. He's most sure to have a leg broke or his back smashed.'

'But he hasn't, though, have you, old chap?' shouted Snap, who had scrambled breathlessly over the logs to the spot from which his old horse had called to him.

'But, Dick,' the boy added, 'how on earth are we ever going to get him out of this?'

And he well might ask. 'The Cradle' couldn't stir, and no wonder. He had seen the danger as well as his masters, and with that wonderful instinct which sometimes serves a beast better than our reason serves us had taken the best means he could to escape it. Finding himself deserted, he crouched down on the lee-side of the great pine which had fallen across Snap's path, and by tucking his knees under him had managed to crawl almost under its projecting side like a rabbit. Tree after tree had crashed over him, but the great butt against which he crouched was solid, and now when Snap found him he was absolutely untouched, but shut in as if in a cage by the great fragments of trees which had broken just over his head. By taking off his pack (which contained two out of the three rifles), and by the free use of an axe, which was also attached to his pack, our friends at last set the old pony free, and they all laughed heartily

as they watched him crawling almost on his belly amongst the timber, even lying down and pushing himself under a log on his side, until the cunning old rascal was rubbing his head on his master's sleeve again.

The other pony they found later on, but, as Dick said, no one but Snap could have had such luck as not to lose his horse in the late storm. The second pony was crushed to pieces. The first tree that struck the poor brute had broken its spine as if it had been a dry twig, and crushed it as a cart-wheel would crush a rat. The pack, too, was crushed and buried under the trees, the only thing which had escaped being Towzer's rifle, which had got torn away from its lashings before the pony was killed.

'Well, we might have done a lot worse,' said Wharton; 'there are all the rifles safe, and old Cradle has the flour and a frying-pan, the axe and the kettle. We shall do very well.'

'Much good the kettle will be,' said Towzer; 'the tea is somewhere under that dead horse, and so are the beans and bacon.'

'Yes,' added Frank, who had been hunting 'about amongst the packs, 'and there isn't a match that will strike amongst us.'

'Never mind that,' said Wharton. 'You have the only muzzle-loader amongst us, haven't you, Frank? Hand it here. We'll camp just where we are.'

Frank obeyed, and the old man chose a spot where some fallen trees formed a kind of square, the centre of which he cleared from débris, and then, taking an axe, he just trimmed off the wet outside of one of the great trunks, and made a big hollow in the dry, half-

burnt tinder. This done, he greased a piece of rag, and, having 'salted it over,' as he expressed it, with grains of gunpowder, he rammed it loosely into one of the barrels of Frank's muzzle-loader, and then fired it into the hollow he had prepared. After one or two tries he succeeded ; the rag caught fire, and set fire to the dry wood, and it kept the boys very hard at work with their axes and a rope to cut off and separate the huge log which formed their camp-fire from the logs around it.

Whilst they were thus employed old Wharton had produced his knife and skinned part of the pony's quarters, which were still protruding from under the tree which had killed him.

'What are you at, Dick?' asked Towzer.

'Just cutting you a steak, my boy,' was the reply ; 'it's a pity, though, that this pony was born so long ago.'

No one fancied his supper much that night, but, after all, the poor old Cradle was the only one of the party who did not share in it. He went supperless to bed ; but all the boys confessed that Dick was not a bad cook, and that pony-steak was very good eating when you had nothing better.

It took our friends two whole days to get out of that ruined forest, and two days of such hard work that Dick, toughened by years of hardship, was the only one who had strength or courage to attempt to fight a fire or cook at night. Indeed, if it had not been for Dick, I doubt if even hunger would have induced the boys to make the effort necessary to get themselves some food ; and without a good meal at

night none of them would have had strength to escape from that interminable tangle of twisted boughs and fallen trunks.

All this time 'the Cradle' had no food. There was nothing to give him, and, except for the rain-puddles, black and thick with charcoal, the party had no water. The men drew their belts and old Cradle's girth tighter every evening, and a more slender-looking or famished party, black and wearied and ragged, never came out of a burnt forest than the wanderers from Rosebud when on the morning of the third day they issued from among the timber and plunged into the welcome stream which made the north-west boundary of this land of desolation.

On the far side were green forests and a stretch of yellow grass, which seemed to revive all 'the Cradle's' worn-out energics. He needed no persuasion to make him plunge into the stream, no hobbles to keep him safe when he reached the further shore.

A bundle of matches, some of which had escaped the rain, had been found, so the men sat down, lit a fire, and as they baked themselves cakes upon the coals they watched with pleasure the steady, business-like way in which the old pony made up for lost time.

When they had all washed and fed they made another march of about fifteen miles, which brought them to the edge of that country in which Dick hoped to feed his cattle.

'Of course,' said he, 'we shall have to come a long way round; you couldn't drive cattle through that wilderness,' pointing back to the brûlé; 'but it is a good country, isn't it?'

And it was! A few miles from where they were camped was a range of high, rocky peaks, with little or no timber upon them. These peaks were quite bare, and one in particular rose like a great pulpit high above the rest, the centre of the highest group of peaks. Up to the foot of this little group of mountains ran Dick's range, a succession of rolling swells of grass-land, studded over with groves and bunches of the red bull pines. It was a splendid, park-like country, and many a group of deer cantered away from them as they rode through it.

'You might as well shoot us something for supper, Snap,' remarked Wharton; 'I guess you're tired like the rest, but you won't have any trouble to speak of in getting a haunch of venison in this here Bull Pine Park of mine.'

'Of ours, Dick!' corrected Towzer, grinning.

'Right you are,' replied the old man; 'but I'm not a-goin' to have any sleeping partners in our firm, so just you get up off of your back, young man, and get some bread made while I cut wood for the night-fire.'

Towzer made a grimace and rolled over on to his face with a yawn, but eventually shook himself and began to make preparations for baking.

'Snap ought to make the bread, by rights,' he grumbled, 'he is such a stunner at the use of baking-powder.'

'Had you there, Snap,' said Frank; 'the young 'un has got "a rise" out of you this time.'

'Quite fair, too,' said Dick. 'I guess Snap got a pretty considerable rise out of the boys at Rosebud with that tarnation Borwick of his.'

But Snap pretended to be out of hearing, and was soon lost among the timber.

There was a good deal to do about the camp that afternoon. All the pack wanted overhauling and cleaning. Charcoal and wood-ash took too prominent a place in the composition of everything in the Cradle's load, from tea to tobacco. The frying-pans had lost their handles, and these had to be replaced by others extemporised from a split stick; the spoons had been lost, so others had to be made from birch-bark; the soup-kettle was lying as flat as a pancake under the dead pony in the brûlé, so another had to be made, and this, too, was of birch-bark.

'How are you going to boil that, Dick, without burning a hole in the bottom?' asked Frank.

'By putting the fire inside instead of out, my lad,' replied he.

'Oh yes, old boy, I twig, and the soup outside instead of in!' cried Towzer. 'Quite simple, isn't it, Frank?'

Dick laughed. Towzer's cheek amused him.

'Here is my heating apparatus, anyway,' he said, raking some red-hot pebbles out of the ashes. 'Now you fill the bark-kettle with cold water.'

Towzer obeyed.

'Now, you see,' said Dick, suiting the action to the word, 'in go the pebbles and the water begins to sing; as soon as the first lot get dark and cool, out they come, and in goes another lot. If you pour the water over your toes by accident, you'll find it piping hot, I promise you; and when you've done doing that and can spare time to look at the bottom of the kettle, you'll find that it ain't got no hole in it.'

'Bully for you, Dick,' assented Towzer, 'your youth doesn't appear to have been as much wasted as I thought it had been.'

'Why don't you give the brat a taste of the lash-rope, Dick? it would do him a world of good.'

'I make a practice never to squash a 'skeeter as long as it only buzzes,' replied Wharton, laughing; 'when it stings, I'm theer, you bet.'

'Snap doesn't seem to be having any luck with the deer,' Frank remarked after a while.

'No,' replied the other; 'I've not heard his rifle myself, but I reckon he's got a bluff between us and him, and then, like enough, we wouldn't hear with that chatterin' young jay-bird anywherees near.'

As the sun was setting, Snap was seen coming down a long glade towards the camp.

'Don't carry his tail in the air, does he?' remarked Towzer. 'I don't believe he has got a thing.'

'He can't have been out three hours here without getting a shot, I'll lay a wager,' said Wharton.

'He's all right, I can see something hanging on his shoulders,' said Frank.

'So can I now,' added Wharton, 'but it's not venison, it's only fool-hens, I'm thinking.'

'A jolly sight better too,' remarked Towzer, smacking his lips greedily.

'What sport, Snap?' they asked as he came up.

'Well,' replied the hunter, throwing down three big blue grouse by the fire, and leaning on his rifle, 'that's the bag.'

'Wal! but you don't mean to say you didn't see

any deer ?' exclaimed Wharton. ' Why, man, the park is full of them. Couldn't you hit 'em ?'

Snap put his finger in the muzzle of his Winchester, and held it up unsoiled.

' Never fired a shot, Dick,' he said. ' I stoned those fool-hens coming home, and my arm regularly aches with shying at them ; but I can't understand about the deer.'

' Why, how do you mean ?' someone asked.

' Well, going from here towards what you call the "Lone Mountain," the wind would be right for me, wouldn't it ?'

' Slap in your teeth ; couldn't be better, what there is of it,' replied Dick.

' Well, and yet every deer I saw had its head up ; almost every one was going at a canter ; and, though, I dare say, at one time and another, I must have seen forty, I never got what I should call a fair shot. You see, we've no cartridges to waste, and I wanted to kill clean, so as to get back at once to camp.'

' Didn't see no sign of bar or painter about, did you ?' asked Wharton.

' No,' replied Snap ; ' I suppose that is what must have been the matter, but I saw no sign.'

Old Wharton looked grave for a minute or two, but presently, after lighting his pipe, seemed to think better of it.

' No,' he muttered, ' it can't be. This is Blackfoot territory if anything ; and, besides, them Crows could never have got here by this time. If it's Blackfeet, they'll not hurt old Dick Wharton.'

' Who will take the first watch ?' asked Wharton

two hours later, when the last grouse-bone had been cleaned, and the old 'Cradle' hobbled for the night. 'Perhaps I had better; I smoke and you lads don't; and, besides, your young eyes are heavier than mine, I reckon,' he added good-naturedly.

The boys made no objection. Towzer, for one, never heard, having gone to sleep some minutes before with a grouse-bone in one hand and a chunk of slap-jack in the other.

'Let the young 'un sleep until he wakes,' said Wharton; 'put him to watch for an hour about midnight, and then one of you take the morning watch, and let him sleep. He's very nearly played out, and he's a game little chap,' said the grey old cowboy kindly.

It was midnight before any one of the boys opened his eyes again, to find old Wharton still watching and still smoking. Towzer had got up, wakened by the chill night-air, to re-arrange his blanket.

'Let me take a turn now, Dick,' he said; 'I've had my beauty sleep and feel as fit as a flea.'

'All right, I'll help you make up the fire,' said Dick, 'and when you have watched for a couple of hours, wake your brother. Let Snap sleep right away until dawn, if he will. He has done more than we have—stalking deer, and so on.'

In ten seconds Wharton was asleep. His tough old form seemed to settle down as easily on to the turf as if it had been a feather-bed. If there were roots or stones about, they didn't seem to incommod him in the least. 'I guess I hurt the roots' is what he once said, when Frank pointed out to him a peculiarly knotty point on which he had been sleeping.

Towzer thought he had never known a night so still. He could hear 'the Cradle' cropping the grass quite plainly.

'What an appetite you have got for a late supper!' thought he as he turned and saw the old pony hopping about in his hobbles.

By-and-by the pony gave a snort, and, looking up with a start—for, truth to tell, he had been nodding sadly—Towzer saw 'the Cradle' standing, with ears keenly cocked, staring into the gloom by the river. Gazing intently in the same direction, Towzer made out the cause of Cradle's alarm. A big grey wolf was sneaking along by the river's edge. The beast seemed to know that he was seen, for, sitting up on his haunches, he gave a low howl and then slipped back into the bushes.

'I'd better drive the pony in,' thought Towzer, and he rose to carry out his project. Just then the grey wolf cantered across the moonlit space in which the pony was feeding, the pony made a furious plunge to get away, and then it seemed to Towzer's startled eyes that the wolf rose on its hind-legs, caught 'the Cradle' by the head, stooped for a moment while something glistened in the moonlight round the pony's fetlocks, and then sprang on to its back and dashed off into the gloom, whilst a red flash came out of the darkness, and something sent the white wood-ash and red embers of the fire right and left over the sleepers.

In a moment all were on their feet. Towzer's mind seemed a blank. Surely the old German stories of were-wolves were not true in this nineteenth century! Hurriedly he told Wharton what he had seen.

'And why, in thunder, didn't you shoot when you saw him by the river?' cried Dick savagely.

'Well, I didn't think it was worth while waking you all for a wolf,' replied Towzer.

'A wolf, man! don't you know *now* it were an Injun?' asked Dick.

'But I heard him howl,' persisted the boy.

'And don't you suppose an Injun can howl *as* well as a wolf? Listen to that.'

As he spoke a long-drawn wailing howl reverberated through the gloomy pines, and from far away by the river came an answering note.

'Crows on the war-path, but not many of 'em, or they would have wiped us all out by now,' muttered Dick. 'Out with the fire, lads, pull them big logs round in a square, and get inside and lie down with your rifles, until we see if they mean to come back for our scalps.'

It was all done in a few seconds. The boys worked as men *can* work when they know that their lives depend on their own promptitude. Old Dick's face and Snap's were worth studying now, if only anyone had had time to study them. The old man snapped out his sentences short and sharp, had an eye for everything, and worked with the quiet, business-like promptitude of an old hand. Snap's eyes were gleaming like coals, and if the light was not playing strange tricks with his face that tightly shut mouth had more than a suspicion of a smile on it. Old Wharton noticed it, and put his hand on his arm, kindly, but firmly:

'I knows what you're thinking, lad; but mind, I'm

boss to-night. If they *should* come, you keep inside here and pot away until I give the word. This sort of fighting isn't like "the ring." If someone hits you once from behind a tree, the best plucked one in the world can't hit him back.'

But they did not come, and, when daylight lit up all the long glades of Bull Pine Park, Wharton gave the boys leave to get up from their impromptu fort.

'Keep your rifles in your hands, and get back the moment a shot is fired, but I reckon we are safe now until nightfall,' said he.

After a while he called to Towzer. 'This is where you saw your wolf, isn't it, young 'un?' he said.

'Yes,' replied Towzer, going towards him.

'Wal! I reckon you never saw a wolf make a track like that afore, did you?' he asked, pointing to the soft mud by the river-bank, in which, plainly visible, were the outlines of a man's hands and feet—a full impression of the former, and just the toe-marks of the latter. 'An Injun on all fours, with a wolf-skin on, that's the sort of animal that was,' remarked Dick; 'but,' he added, as he noticed Towzer's miserable expression, 'never mind, laddie, I've known deer let an Injun walk among 'em in a stag's hide and antlers, so perhaps we ought to forgive a tender-foot for being took in by the crafty devils.'

As soon as the pack which the lost 'Cradle' should have carried could be divided amongst the party, Wharton led the way to the river. Wading in knee-deep, the old man led them up stream for nearly a couple of hours. The boys had thought struggling through the brûlé bad enough, but this was a vast

deal worse, and they were ready to drop from fatigue. At last they could go no longer, and implored old Wharton to choose some easier road.

'Well, I guess this will do,' said he; 'it is pretty stony here, and I don't think even our friends the Crows could pick up our trail on this stuff.'

So they landed, and stepped out as briskly as their numbed limbs would let them over a stony slope on which hardly a blade of grass grew, so hard it seemed to Frank that cart-wheels wouldn't mark it, much less mocassins.

The course which Wharton took led them towards the Lone Mountain, within a short distance of which they camped that night, making for themselves a rough fortress of boulders, and (intensely to Towzer's disgust) doing without fire and tea.

'Cold tommy after a day like this!' ejaculated he mournfully, holding up a chunk of heavy dry bread as he spoke.

'Better anyway than cold steel for supper!' said Dick, a little grimly.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GAMBLERS 'PUT UP'

'TOWZER, my lad, you musn't take it unkindly, but I think you and Frank had better watch together to-night. You see you ain't as used to camping out as Snap and me, and there's a good deal of risk to-night,' said Wharton.

'Quite right, Dick!' said Frank; 'I know we're duffers, but Rome wasn't built in a day.'

'No, no, lad, I know that, and you'll be as good as any of us by-and-by. Will you and Snap take the first watch till midnight?'

'All right; wake up, young 'un!' cried Frank.

'No fear of us both sleeping at once,' said Towzer sulkily to his brother, 'you snore so.'

After an hour or two spent in watching all the mysterious shadows which begin only to move and live in the forest after the moon comes up, Towzer noticed something which seemed to him more substantial than the shadows creeping slowly up a glade towards the camp. Towzer gripped his brother's arm and pointed silently towards it.

'A hind feeding up this way, isn't it?' whispered Frank.

'I don't know; that Indian was a wolf last night,

it's likely enough he'll be a hind to-night ; but, hind or Indian, I'm going to put a bullet into him as soon as he comes close enough to make certain,' answered the boy savagely, and he sank slowly on to his stomach to get a steady shot with his rifle.

Just then the thing, whatever it was, came out into the moonlight.

' Hold hard, Towzer, it's "the Cradle" ; I can see his white fetlock as plain as the nose on your face.'

' Might be an Indian in his skin,' answered Towzer, only half convinced.

' No, no, I can see him quite plainly, can't you ? And he is alone and unsaddled. Let's see what he'll do.'

Slowly the pony came along, smelling every now and then at the ground, and at last walked boldly into the camp, and, bending his neck, hung his wise old head over Snap's sleeping form, and rubbed his velvet muzzle against the boy's cheek.

Snap was on his legs in a minute.

' Why, old chap, where have you come from ? ' he cried, and the pony laid back his ears and whinnied ever so softly. It was a regular pony whisper.

Frank and Towzer came up and by this time old Wharton was sitting up too, his hand upon his rifle.

' Slipped them durned Redskins, hev you, old fellow ? ' laughed Dick softly. ' Well, I've known you get rid of better men than they'll ever be, before now ; but bust me if I can guess how you found us out. You haven't brought Frank's rifle along, I suppose,' he added, for the shot fired the night before had been from Frank's rifle, which the Indian had

somewhat managed to steal from the bough from which it was hanging. Unfortunately, even ‘the Cradle’s’ ‘cuteness had not gone as far as this.

‘I say, Snap,’ said Wharton, coming out of a very brown study, in which he had remained for nearly five minutes, ‘it’s a very bright moon to-night, isn’t it?’

‘Never saw a brighter,’ said the boy.

‘That isn’t the way “the Cradle” kem along, is it now?’ asked Wharton, pointing down the glade.

‘Yes, that’s where I first saw him,’ said Towzer, pointing.

‘Ah!’ continued Wharton. ‘Now, did it ever strike you that that haze down theer wasn’t altogether nat’ral, not on a night like this, anyway?’ and he pointed to a thin vapour which hung about the trees some three miles away.

The boys looked in the direction indicated, and saw the vapour plainly enough.

‘Well?’ said Snap, and waited.

‘Wal!’ returned Dick, ‘that’s them durned Redskins. They don’t think we’ll dare to follow them; the pony has slipped ’em, that shows they are pretty careless, and’ (with a vigorous slap on his thigh) ‘if you’re game I’m going the way that theer Cradle came, and am goin’ to have Frank’s rifle and an Injun’s hair in camp right here before daylight.’

Here, in the heart of civilisation, Dick’s speech sounds bloodthirsty, and his programme of amusement for that autumn night anything but attractive. Out there, in those wild forests, the boys only remembered that grey wolf changing in the moonlight into a thieving savage; they remembered the rifle-ball that

luckily scattered the ashes of their camp-fire and not their brains ; they remembered the lost pony and lost rifle, and nothing more. Rising, they stood, tall, silent, young figures in the moonlight, ready to follow Dick Wharton anywhere.

'Towzer, my lad,' said Dick, 'I am going to give you the worst work of all. You must wait with "the Cradle" ; and if anything happens to us, if we aren't back in six hours' time, get on the pony's back, turn his head for the river, and let him lead you. He'll take you back to Rosebud somehow, and then you bring the boys on our trail. Keep your rifle ; I've got my six-shooter, and you'll, may be, want it. Good-bye, lad, there's not much fear, but we'll see you again soon.'

There was a lump in Towzer's throat. It was hard to be the youngest and miss all the fun ; to be left alone, and have perhaps that terrible ride home ; but he could not help feeling that Dick was right, for all that. Either of the others was twice the man that he was for fighting, and then, too, if it came to a long ride, he was three stone lighter even than Snap, and Frank was heavier than either. So he shook hands as heartily as he could, and stood watching his brother and his friend glide noiselessly down the glade after old Wharton.

What fine fellows they looked, to be sure ! Snap was a perfectly built athlete, if there ever was one—tall and wiry, with not an ounce of spare flesh anywhere. Frank was the biggest of the three, a huge bull-necked Englishman, a man who could have killed even Snap as a terrier kills a rat if he got him in a

railway-carriage or a corner, but no match for his active friend in the open. As for Dick, he was tough and old, 'old, with the might and breath of twenty boys.'

In a few minutes they had all mingled with the shadows, and Towzer and 'the Cradle,' alone, stood craning their necks after them in vain.

But we have the fairy cap, and, my boys, with your leave, will follow those three silent forms. Old Wharton had a true woodman's instinct for direction, and, having once ascertained for what point he wanted to steer, he kept his course truly and with no apparent effort. Now and again he bent down as he crossed 'the Cradle's' tracks, but he did not depend upon them for guidance. At last he paused, and, beckoning the boys to his side, whispered :

'Their camp is close to here. I'll creep on and have a look at it first, and come back to you when I've seen how the land lies.'

The two young Englishmen crouched down and waited. By some instinct, when the old fellow had slid away like a snake in the grass, Snap held out his hand silently to Frank, who gripped it hard in silence. It was an Englishman's oath. They had silently sworn to do or die.

It seemed hours before anything more happened, but at last a part seemed to detach itself from one of the pine-trees at which Frank was looking, and came gliding into the moon-lit space. It was old Wharton returning.

'They're all right,' he whispered; 'couldn't be better!'

'What, are they all asleep?' asked Snap.

' Better nor that, pard,' the old frontiersman chuckled; 'they're gambling for all they're worth; come along !' and, signing to them to follow, he glided away again from tree to tree, until at last the boys could see the red gleams of a camp-fire on the pines in front of them.

Another half-dozen yards and the whole scene was presented to their eyes. In a little hollow of grass burned the camp-fire, and in its light sat half a dozen Redskins in a group, three facing the other three. They were all squatting on their hams when Snap caught sight of them, and all chanting a kind of song which sounded like a witch's incantation more than like a decent expression of merriment, such as a song should be. The fire lit up their ugly faces, painted with bars of vermillion and black; gleamed on their long, snaky tresses, and glittered in their bead-like black eyes. Much to old Wharton's delight, too, it flickered back from a pile of rifles stacked under a pine a good twenty paces from the group of gamblers.

As the boys reached their point of view Buck Rabbit seemed the chief actor in the game. He had his back to them, but there was no fear of mistaking even his back, with its high, broad shoulders, heavy with knots and lumps of muscle, and that great bullet-shaped head, which seemed set right between them, with nothing but one great wrinkle of fat to show where the neck should be. His hands as they looked at him were the only moving things in the firelight, and they flitted and flashed backwards and forwards until you grew dizzy as you watched them, the old droning song rising and falling with the pace of the

hands. The three men facing him had their eyes fastened on Buck Rabbit's hands all the while with an intensity which reminded the spectators of a cat watching a mouse or a snake trying to fascinate a bird. Suddenly, quick as a snake's stroke, one of the Indians opposite to Buck Rabbit shot out his arm and laid a long dark finger upon one of the chief's hands. For a moment the song dropped. As his hand was touched Buck Rabbit stretched it out across the firelight, palm uppermost and empty! One of the three opposite to him without a word stooped down, and, taking one from a bundle of short sticks beside him, threw it across to Buck Rabbit's party, when the song again rose and the hands again dashed backwards and forwards in the firelight.

'I wonder, now, what that stick were worth? A blanket or a beaver-skin, you bet,' whispered Dick; 'or, may be, it's scalps they're playing for!'

'I don't understand the game,' answered Frank in the same low murmur.

'Oh, it's simple enough. That handsome old friend of ours has got a piece of bone in one of his hands. They've got to tell him in which hand it is. If they are right, he pays. If not, they do,' replied Dick. 'They'd go on at that game until this time to-morrow if we let them,' he added; 'but I guess we'll rise the winners this journey.'

'Now,' he whispered after a pause, 'you just be here and cover those Crows with your Winchesters. You, Snap, draw a bead on a spot about halfway between Buck Rabbit's shoulders, and you, Frank, cover that old villain with a little tuft of hair on his chin and

only one eye. That's Teevcevex, the medicine-man, and the biggest scoundrel in the whole lot. If one moves before you hear me speak, fire and keep shooting as long as an Indian is left to shoot at.'

This last sentence the old man hissed out with an energy which impressed his hearers, and before it was well finished he had gone again. The boys could hear their hearts beat, and the only wonder to them was that the Indians could not hear them too, so loudly they seemed to thump against their ribs.

This time, it seemed, Teeveevex had been too many for old Buck Rabbit. His long, skinny claws clutched the chief's wrist like a vice, and when his palm was turned up the little ivory disc gleamed in it. All the shiny, evil-looking heads were bent together, when a voice rang out clear and hard in the stillness, 'Hands up! the man who moves dies!'

The boys were as much startled as the Redskins. Looking up they saw the Indians sullenly and in silence lift their hands above their heads, red statues of wrath glaring fiercely but helplessly at a tall, rigid figure in the moonlight, standing between them and their rifles, its right arm raised, its vigilant eyes noting their every breath, and in its ready right hand a revolver, on which the moonlight rested cold and chill. That little weapon held the lives of six men. If one dared to move, that one died before he could draw another breath. They knew that. At ten yards old Dick Wharton could not miss. How they must have cursed the madness which had riveted their eyes on that glancing bone whilst this avenger stole between them and their weapons! If all rose and dashed at

him he would not have time to kill more than one or two, but then he who led that movement must die, and, even so, would the others back him up? It was a hard question. No one was ready to make that first move and pay the price, and so, as men always do when 'put up' by a resolute man who 'has the drop upon them,' they sat still.

'Boys,' said the voice again, 'you can git up now and take these here rifles from behind me. Look sharp.'

Frank and Snap needed no second bidding, though they felt the six men's eyes following their movements. Their eyes were all they dared to move, for they knew that even while he issued his orders Dick Wharton's eyes never left them for a moment; like the muzzle of his revolver, they rested on them unceasingly.

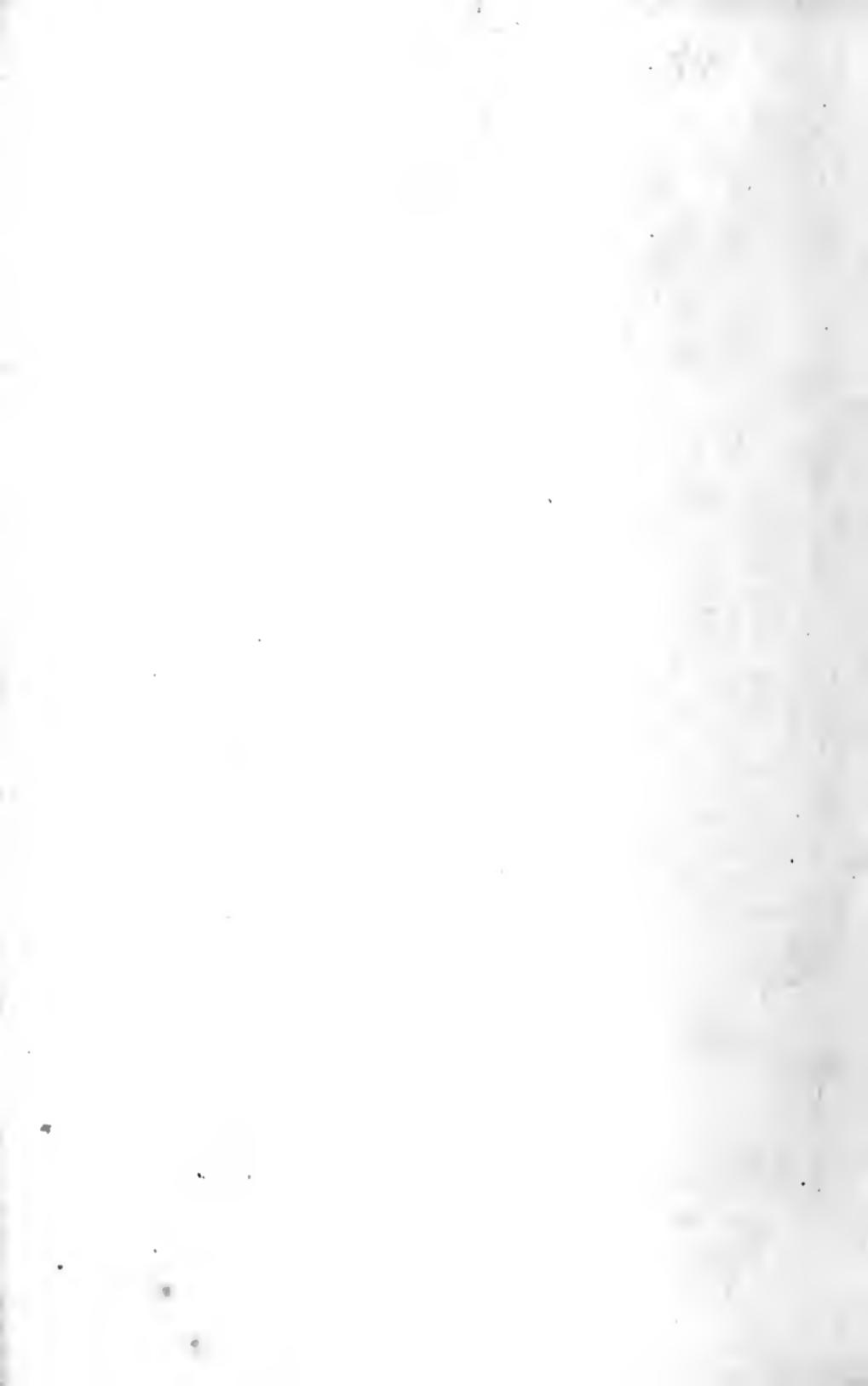
'There's a Redskin tied up to a tree and gagged behind them rifles,' the voice continued; 'cut his thongs and set him free; give him a rifle and see as it's loaded; pick a rifle for me and see as that's loaded; take all the cartridges as you can get your claws on, and then smash up them other rifles against the handiest bull-pine. Do you mind me?'

'All right, Dick,' answered Snap, his knife already hacking at the leather thongs which bound the captive Indian, a fine-looking fellow, whose eyes glistened, but whose tongue said nothing even when Snap took away the gag.

He stretched his arms stiffly, and bent the joints of both legs and arms backwards and forwards once or twice as if uncertain whether or not he had lost the use of them, and when first set free he almost fell



'HANDS UP'



from weakness or stiffness—and no wonder, for his bonds had cut deep into his flesh and were dark with his blood.

Crash! crash! went the butts of the good rifles against the bull-pine. It seemed a sad waste, but they were Dick's orders and he was in command.

'Are you through there?' cried the voice again.

'Yes,' cried Frank.

'All the rifles broke, mine loaded, the Indian free and armed, and the cartridges pouched?' he inquired again.

'Yes, Dick,' they replied.

'Very well; now keep your rifles ready if they try to rush me,' said Wharton, and then added, to the figures by the fire:

'Now, gentlemen, I'll not detain you any longer; you can skip;' and, dropping his revolver, he turned on his heel and joined the boys. As he did so a report rang out, and then another. The next moment Dick Wharton had wrenched the smoking rifle from the hands of the Indian whom Snap had released; but it was too late, one of the gamblers had a bullet through his skull, and the great hare-lipped chief himself reeled for a moment as the second bullet cut through the muscles of his arm. With a curse, however, he recovered himself, and, dripping with blood, followed his comrades into the forest.

'Why does my brother spare these dogs?' cried the Blackfoot; 'we should have taken six scalps to-night, and my brother has but one.'

'We don't set much store by scalps, exceptin' our own, Warwolf,' replied the cowboy; 'and whites don't

care about shootin' men without arms in their hands.'

It took all Dick Wharton's eloquence, however, and tried Warwolf's gratitude for his deliverance to the uttermost, before he could be persuaded not to pursue the five unhappy Crows that night. It was a clear waste of the good gifts of Providence, he thought, and, though Dick Wharton might be a good fellow and a mighty warrior for a whiteskin, he could not help feeling that he was something quite out of the common as a fool. He followed his old friend Wharton back to camp, however, and there dressed his wounds, and gave his deliverers some account of what had been happening lately in Bull Pine Park and its neighbourhood.

Needless to say that for a night or so, at any rate, the three boys and the old foreman, with Warwolf for an ally, had no fear of attack from the disarmed Crows. Still they kept a good look-out, from habit.

CHAPTER XX

LONE MOUNTAIN

WHEN night closed in round the little camp in the forest, Warwolf lit the pipe of peace, and after gravely puffing away in silence for a few minutes began to tell his story.

‘It was when this moon was young, my brother, when it was no more than a thin silver boat sailing through the dark night, that Hilcomax, the medicine-man of the Blackfeet, warned the chiefs in council of great events about to happen. Hilcomax the healer had been away from the camp of his tribe for many suns, collecting herbs and preparing great medicine against Okeeheedee, the evil one, when one morning he saw the sky darkened by great wings, and, looking up, he saw the destroyer pass over him far, far up among the shuddering clouds of heaven. Slowly the great wings came down until their shadow darkened the forest, and Hilcomax saw them glide towards the burial-grounds of our fathers on the Lone Mountain.

‘In the darkness of night Hilcomax crept back towards the home of his people, and warned the chiefs in council of what he had seen.’

Here Warwolf paused for a moment or two, blowing

out a great cloud of blue smoke from his pipe, and watching it thoughtfully as it melted away in the night air.

‘Youth, my brothers,’ he continued, ‘is light as that smoke, and every wind carries it away. I would not listen to the medicine-man’s warnings, but came to the foot of the “Lone Mountain,” trapping. For my folly the Crows caught me—the white-hearted, hare-lipped chief of the Crows—and would have taken me to his squaws to torture, had not my brothers rescued me. He, too, has seen the bird which hovers over the graves of the Blackfeet, and his woman’s heart froze at the sight.’

‘And has the chief seen this bird himself?’ asked Dick Wharton.

‘Warwolf has seen it,’ he replied.

‘And that is about all he means to tell you,’ muttered Snap aside, and Snap was right.

In spite of all Wharton’s ingenious pumping the Indian would tell no more, except that the Lone Mountain was accursed, that the white spirits of dead chiefs were wandering about it, bewailing the trouble that was to come, and that far up above the graveyards of the Indians brooded this great white bird. As to what the bird was like, though he had seen it, he would say nothing. Indians are always very loth to discuss what they call medicine, *i.e.* magic and things relating thereto, and this bird was the spirit of evil incarnate.

‘All gammon, I suppose, Dick?’ asked Frank later on.

‘Well, no, not altogether,’ replied he; ‘of course I

can't explain what he is driving at, but you may bet there is some truth at the bottom of his story—a trick, most likely, of his own rascally medicine-man; but, whatever it is, neither Crows nor Blackfeet will be about here as much as usual for some time, and that's bully for us.'

The next three days were spent in looking for the most suitable spot on which to erect the hut in which to pass the winter, and in hunting and drying the flesh of the beasts they killed. Warwolf remained with them, lending a hand and giving advice, whilst his strength gradually returned, and the deep cuts made by the thongs of the Crows healed over and disappeared.

On the fourth day all were busy in camp, preparing the winter quarters, except Frank, who had been sent out to get fresh meat, and, being a poor and inexperienced hand at stalking, had apparently been led far from home before getting his shot. Towards evening, however, the crack of his rifle was heard again and again.

'By Jove!' cried Towzer, 'Major has got amongst them now, at any rate.'

'Yes,' remarked Wharton; 'I wish as he'd remember that we haven't got a cartridge factory handy, though.'

'By George! how he is wasting them!' added Snap as report after report rang out in the distance.

All this time Warwolf stood still as a stone, listening.

'My brothers had better be ready,' he now said; 'Frank fired once half an hour ago. Warwolf heard

him. Those last shots were not fired by the white hunter.'

'Who fired them then?' cried Towzer.

'The Crows,' replied the chief.

'The Crows! then——' and the boy stopped and his face fell.

'Come, Dick,' said Snap, catching up his rifle. 'Warwolf is right, but we may save him yet, and if not——'

'No,' interrupted Warwolf, 'the white warriors will wait here. Warwolf will go and find out what has happened. The white hunter lives still. If the Crows had got a fair shot at him they would have fired once and my brother would have died. If he had been surrounded he would have fought, his rifle would have answered theirs, and we should have heard it. But he escaped as soon as the Crows discovered him; those shots were fired when our brother dashed into the forest. I go to meet him.' And so the Indian glided away and was gone.

'Best leave him have his own way,' said Wharton, 'he knows more than we do, and he'll give his own hair to save Frank's.'

The two boys could not deny the justice of what old Wharton said, but the waiting for news was weary work for all that, and even Wharton was making preparations to start on a search for his two comrades, when they came back to camp, Frank pale and bleeding, leaning heavily on Warwolf, whose hunting-shirt was soaked with the boy's blood.

'Stand back, and don't worry him with questions,' commanded old Dick; 'and you, young 'un, if you

want to help your brother, pile them rugs up for us to bed him down on. What is it, Warwolf ?' he added as he lowered the boy, half fainting from loss of blood, on to the skins.

'The white hunter shot a buck near a camp of Crows. An Indian would have seen their camp-fire before he saw the buck, but the white man had only eyes for the buck. The Crows heard the shot, and their braves stole round the hunter. Had he not been fleeter than the pronghorn on the prairie, they would have scalped him before dusk. As it is, he has only got a bullet through his arm. To-morrow he will be rested and well ;' and, so saying, the chief went on preparing some herbs and simple remedies which he had drawn from a sack of beaver-skin which he carried about him.

'Are there many of the Crows in camp ?' asked Dick.

'A large party on the war-path,' replied Warwolf, bandaging up Frank's arm in a kind of herb-poultice.

'What does my brother advise ?' asked Dick.

'If the young hunter was strong enough to travel,' replied the Indian, 'we might escape to-night and perhaps reach my tribe before the accursed Crows overtook us. As it is, we must wait and fight here. We shall kill many of them.'

'But,' said Snap, 'we cannot possibly beat off so large a party. It will cost every one of us our lives.'

'It will,' replied the Indian grimly; 'but it will cost the Crows more.'

'Oh, hang the Crows,' cried Dick, 'I don't think

much of your plan, chief, though I confess I can think of nothing better.'

'I can though, Dick,' said Snap.

'Out with it then, my boy.'

'Well, didn't Warwolf say that it was only six or seven miles from here to the Lone Mountain?'

'That's so,' replied Wharton.

'And,' continued Snap, 'since this terrible bird has settled there, no Indian will put foot on the mountain.'

'You've got it, Snap,' cried Dick enthusiastically, 'that's our chance, we can carry Frank that far.'

Warwolf's face had been a study while the boy spoke, and now he broke in with vehement endeavours to dissuade the whites from their rash undertaking.

'No! no! Warwolf,' replied Wharton, 'you may believe in your great bird if *you* like, but I guess the only birds as trouble me just now are them tarnation Crows.'

'My brothers must please themselves,' replied the chief; 'Warwolf will die with them, if they wish, here at the hands of the Crows, but to enter the Lone Mountain now is madness. If my brothers will, they must go alone.'

'Right you are, chief; this much you shall do for us,' said Snap: 'help us to take Frank on my pony to the foot of the mountain, then do you take the pony and escape to your own tribe and bring them with you to save us.'

'To avenge you?' said the Indian.

'Very well, to avenge us,' assented Snap, and so it was settled.

Frank was put on the Cradle's back, and in silence,

with rifles at the ready, they broke up their camp and crept through the forest towards the haunted mountain.

The dawn was coming when the chief left them, his fine, fierce face clouded with a sorrow which even his stoicism could not conceal. He looked on his friends as going to their doom. He tried once more to persuade them either to stop and fight the Crows in some extemporised fort in the forest, or to trust to the Crows not catching them before they could reach the Blackfoot village.

'It's no good, Warwolf,' said Dick, 'with a party as big as ours they would catch us before to-morrow midday. You and the Cradle may get off if you are clever, and they won't follow us up there,' pointing to the peak, now showing in places through the morning mists above the great pines.

Without a word the Indian turned and left them, backing the pony carefully over the old trail; he had already risked more than a thousand Crows in coming so near to the accursed spot, and he would not wait to hear the air full of the rushing of wings and see Okeeheedee stoop from his mountain crag and destroy the white men.

Frank's strength was coming back a little by this time, so that with Snap and Dick to help him he was able to walk with the rest.

As the sun rose the little party emerged from the forest on to a small prairie, from the further side of which rose the abrupt black mass of the Lone Mountain, an isolated spur of the chain which separated the land of the Crows from the hunting-grounds of the Blackfeet. Round the foot of the great rock

wound a rapid stream, which had risen somewhere in the mountains beyond it, and perhaps a thousand feet above the stream was a broad, grassy terrace covered with tents, banners, and what looked in the faint light of dawn like the figures of men.

'Sink down!' cried Snap as he caught sight of this encampment. 'The Crows are there before us.'

'No, they aren't,' replied Dick; 'them's Blackfeet there.'

'Then we're safe, aren't we?' asked Frank with a sigh of relief.

'Not yet, my hearty,' replied Dick cheerily, 'but we soon shall be. Them's dead Blackfeet up there, and I guess they'll skeer the Crows more nor live 'uns.'

'Dead Blackfeet!' ejaculated Towzer.

'Yes, young 'un, just a graveyard, that's all!' replied Wharton.

As they drew near, the boys saw that he was right. The figures were monuments of wood, carved like men sometimes, at others like quaintly devised demons. The pennons floated from what were but dead men's headstones, and in the white tents with open doorways lay chieftains sleeping the last long sleep and waiting 'till the flush of morning, the morning of another world, should break along their battlefield.'

Suddenly an exclamation from Towzer drew all eyes to a point a few hundred feet above this camp of the dead. The boy's eyes were wide open, and his jaw dropped in horror. His flesh crept as he looked.

Above the graveyard the rock rose sheer and steep, a wall of rock like the side of a house, and yet as the boys looked in the misty light they saw one after

another a long train of white figures slowly passing across it. One by one they paced along, sedate and slow, their snowy whiteness coming out in strong contrast to the gloom of their surroundings.

'What is it?' asked Snap in an awed under-tone.

'Bust me if I knows,' said Dick with savage earnestness, 'but, ghosts or no, I am a-goin' to hide up there. I guess ghosts don't hurt as much as Crows, anyway.'

Meanwhile Snap had brought his glass to bear on the rock.

'All right, Dick,' he laughed, 'you were pretty near. If they aren't ghosts they are goats, which sounds something like it, though I never heard of goats like 'em before.'

'Rocky Mountain goats! are they, by thunder?' ejaculated Wharton; 'wal, I've often heerd tell of 'em, but never seed any till to-day. You're sure they are goats, Snap?'

'Yes, quite sure; but look for yourself,' and he handed the glasses to Wharton.

'Well, they're rum-looking critters,' remarked Dick after a long stare at the white procession now disappearing over a shoulder of the rock; 'they're goats right enough, though they do look more like little buffalo-bulls with that hump on their shoulders. But, all the same, they're Warwolf's ghosts as well,' he added with a laugh.

After tramping round the foot of the mountain for a while, Towzer, who was ahead of the rest, called out, 'And there's Warwolf's bird, by Jupiter! our old friend the balloon!'

Even Frank managed to 'boil up' a trot when they

heard this, to find Towzer staring up to the highest peak, six or seven thousand feet above where they then stood, over the very topmost stone of which a great balloon seemed to hover.

No wonder that that great mass of white silk, rising and falling as if all a-tremble with life, now darting out a few yards from its eyrie, now settling slowly back again, had filled the simple Indians with fear and awe. Even to the whites, who understood it, it was a marvel. What was it doing there? Who brought it, and why did he anchor his sky-ship in such a harbour? Where, too, was he, its master mariner?

These, and a dozen questions such as these, passed through their minds as they gazed. Reading his companions' unspoken thoughts and answering them, Snap said at last:

'I reckon we had better go and see.'

'Yes!' said Dick, 'we should be pretty snug up there alongside Okeeheedee as they call this bird of theirs; but it is a mighty stiff climb, and I don't know how we shall get ourselves up, let alone Frank here.'

'Leave me here, Dick,' said Frank; 'the Crows won't dare to come as near the peak as this, and in a day or two I shall be strong enough to come to you, if they are not sick of waiting for us by that time.'

'We'll see you sugared first, old fellow, and then we won't,' replied Towzer. 'Come along out of that,' and, taking one arm, whilst Snap took the other, he helped his brother along until they reached the level of the graveyard.

Here the road grew worse, and it soon became a question of rock-climbing, pure and simple. Then

it was that the forethought which becomes habitual with the North-western hunter showed itself. From his waist Old Dick unwound a long lariat, and at the first seemingly impossible place got the party out of their difficulties easily enough by throwing the loop over a projecting point a great many feet above them and climbing up by the ladder thus extemporised to the little point itself. The boys followed him one after another, and then Snap and Dick, having instructed Frank to make the rope fast under his arms, hauled him up alongside of them. From here, by using the dizzy little gallery along which the wild goats had gone, the party managed to get to that shoulder over which they had seen the goats disappear.

By this time the balloon was comparatively close to them. They could see its car, and that it was anchored by a rope to the rocks over which it hung. They could have seen a man, had one been there, but they saw none. Hoping that if they could attract his attention he would show them the road to his eyrie, the boys whistled again and again. But no answer came, except the echo of their own whistles and the shrill scream of a hawk which they had disturbed from its look-out.

‘Deuced odd !’ said Snap.

‘Asleep or dead, I should think,’ said Frank, and the croak of a great raven sailing by below them, so close that they could see its bright yellow eye looking at them, seemed to echo ‘Dead ! dead !’

‘Not a cheerful locality, even for a graveyard,’ muttered Snap as the sun was hidden for a second behind the cliffs ; ‘however, for’ard on !’

CHAPTER XXI

AT THE TOP

'BEAT, I think,' said Snap a little later; and, indeed, it looked as if man could go no higher than the point to which, by infinite toil, the boys had now attained.

'You two stay here a little,' he added to the two Winthrops, 'and take care of the grub and the rifle,' for, in spite of the difficulties of the ascent, Wharton had insisted on bringing one rifle and his 'six-shooter,' as well as a handkerchief full of bread per man.

'Dick, you will come with me, won't you?' he asked, and, as the old trapper nodded his head in assent, he added, 'Very well, then: do you get a good grip of something so that you could hold my weight up if necessary, and give me the other end of that lariat round my waist.'

The place to which they had attained was a narrow ledge of granite, ending in a niche in the rock, with an overhanging roof to it. Above was a smooth needle of solid rock, broken and ragged at the summit, but for two hundred feet as smooth and perpendicular as a pillar of marble. There were no crannies in this into which to insert toes and fingers,

however strong and daring. The storms and snows of ten thousand years had worn the granite until its face was polished like the face of a jewel, and it was hard as a diamond.

'I don't think even the Alpine Club could tackle that,' Frank had said when they first saw the peak.

'I'm not so sure of that,' Snap answered; 'they couldn't from here, of course, but perhaps there's a way round. Remember, they climbed the Dru.'

And now, with the dogged pluck which characterised the boy, he was going to look for what he called a way round. The position was this. The hollow in which the party lay ended abruptly. Beyond it was the polished rock, without a blade of grass or a twig upon it. Above was two hundred feet of the same, bending, if anything, a little towards the would-be climber, as if the giant spire were about to tumble over into the gulf of clouds and mist which lay below. If any of our little party toppled out of their nest they had a clean run for two or three thousand feet, as old Dick said, and 'nothing of any consequence to hinder 'em between that and the prairie.'

The lariat was fast round old Dick's waist, and securely fastened, too, to Snap's leather belt, which he had taken the precaution of fixing well up under his armpits. A close scrutiny of the rock to the right of the crevice had shown the boys that, though there was no cranny big enough for a sparrow to perch upon above, there was just one narrow, thread-like crack running from the end of their niche towards the sharp edge of the needle, which, jutting out some

fifteen feet from them, formed a corner round which they could not see anything.

'That's our chance,' said Snap; 'I can get my fingers in here, and, as I can see it all the way, I expect it gets larger further on.'

All the party looked white and drawn except Snap; it was a desperate risk, and all knew it, and old Dick would gladly have persuaded the boy to rest content with their present quarters. But it was too late now. As the old foreman knelt with his face inwards, gripping the rock, ready at any moment to take the strain which Snap's fall would put upon the rope, the latter was digging his fingers deeply into the solitary crack. He had taken off his moccasins, and was barefooted and in his shirt-sleeves. Even his cap was off. He wanted no encumbrances, however slight, just now. Two or three times he tried his grip, and then, clinging with his bare feet to the smooth rock, he let himself go and hung spread-eagled against the granite wall.

As he hung dangling by the first joints of his fingers over the horrid abyss a cold wind came and struck him. It blew his damp hair back from his face, it seemed to chill his straining fingers, and to threaten to tear him from his precarious hold. But not for one half-second did he hesitate. He had considered the peril and braced himself to meet it. Slowly, a foot at a time, he worked his way along. The first foot or two was the difficult part of his journey, for there, as he shifted his hold, his body hung literally upon four fingers and no more. But he comforted himself with the thought of the stout lariat round his waist and the strong arms which held it in the niche



ON THE FACE OF THE CLIFF

he had left. After the first few feet he was able to get more of his hands into the rock, and, though his eye had not noticed them, his bare feet found little inequalities and rough spots to which they clung like the feet of a fly to the ceiling.

As he drew near the corner his excitement grew, hope and fear alternating in his breast. At last he could look round it, and he saw that the proverb was again justified, ‘Where there’s a will there’s a way.’

‘A precious bad way,’ thought Snap, ‘but still better than this,’ and, so thinking, he crept round the corner, and after what had seemed an age to him again got his foot on a firm hold. For here round the corner was a broad ledge, as if made by the falling away from the cone of some great chip of granite when that convulsion had taken place which had rent the cone from its very summit to where he stood. Now too he saw clearly that, though solid on the other side, a great crack ran down the peak on this side, just big enough for a man to squeeze into at the bottom, and slowly widening, until at the top the cone was divided into three distinct peaks, on the largest of which the balloon was anchored.

Snap had arranged with Dick that three sharp tugs at the lariat meant ‘Come along, I can hold you.’ First he passed a bit of the lariat round a jutting corner of the broken rock, and then he gave the three tugs agreed upon.

With eyes shut and heart beating he clung to the rock, and prayed that Dick might not slip. It seemed an hour of waiting until he heard a loud gasp at his side, and Dick’s voice panting out:

‘Wal, I reckon that’s summat of a crawl, but blow me if I think Natur’ ever meant me to do them blue-bottle tricks.’

As he spoke it seemed as if a thaw had suddenly set in in Snap’s heart, the relief was so great, and, clinging hard to the rocks, they both laughed until the boys in the crevice heard them, and wished that they were there to share in the merriment.

‘Wal, now, Snap, what next? You couldn’t set us an easier one this time, now, could you?’ asked Dick.

‘Yes, Dick, it’s not so bad this time, it’s only what mountaineers call a chimney, and then we shall be there.’

‘Oh, only a chimney, he says,’ muttered Dick; ‘fust you turns bluebottle, then you turns sweep—all quite natural, of course—and then you’re *there*. And, unless we turn balloonatics when we git there, there, it seems to me, we’ll stick!’

‘You follow me, Dick,’ said Snap, ‘and do as I do; shove your elbows and knees against the opposite sides of the crack as soon as you have room to, and wriggle up.’

Dick obeyed, talking away to himself all the while, so that, had the danger been less, the inclination to laugh would have taken the strength out of Snap’s arms and let him down with a crash.

‘Look out for stones, Dick!’ cried Snap all at once, as a few great fragments of granite came rattling down.

‘All right, sonny,’ cried the voice from below; ‘never mind the “sut,” but tell us when the top brick’s a-comin’.’

'Now, Dick,' said Snap, after about fifty feet of this work, 'you'll have to shove your back and hands against one side and your feet against the other, like this, and shove your way up so.'

'All right, pard, I understand : I've got to sit on about 5,000 feet of nothing at all and keep going up'ards. Quite simple. Go ahead !'

'Hang it, Dick, do be serious,' replied Snap, laughing.

'Well, so I am, ain't I ?' replied the old man ; 'you don't suppose I'm here for enjoyment, do you ?

Snap, looking down between his legs at the cowboy below him, would have exploded with laughter had he dared to. The old chap was growling away to himself, and puffing and blowing with the unusual exercise, but gripping the rock with hands like eagles' claws, and pushing with his strong legs until, as Snap told him afterwards, he was in momentary dread of seeing the opposite wall come down.

'Now hold on a bit, Dick,' cried the voice above after a pause, 'and toss that lariat up my way if you can.'

There was a good deal of grumbling, but at last the lariat lay across Snap's legs, and, getting hold of it, he made cast after cast at a little spike of rock some ten feet above him. It was difficult shooting with a noose at such a mark in such a position, and he heartily wished old Dick could change places with him. But that was impossible.

'I reckon my back 'll hold out about three more shies, Snap,' said the voice from below ; 'there ain't much starch left in it.'

'All right, Dick,' replied Snap, 'I've lassoed the rock now, firm and fast. One minute!'

The old man saw the boy hang on to the rope and scramble by its help to the point above mentioned.

'Now, Dick!' he cried, and Dick caught the rope and scrambled up after his companion.

'All easy-going now, like going upstairs,' said Snap; and so indeed it was, for the two were now on the last torn pinnacle of the summit, which was so cracked and riven that a child could have climbed it.

'Poor chap! So that's his story!' exclaimed Wharton ten minutes later, as a great bird, gorged and heavy, rose sullenly from a cup-like hollow in the top of the main peak and slid on silent wings into the deep sky beyond.

Where the bird rose, lay what had been a man, and that not many days ago; but the elements and the fowls of heaven had not left enough of the poor clay to tell whether he was white or red. On closer inspection a grey Tyrolese hat with green riband, and tuft of izzard's hair set in it as a plume, told Snap even his nationality, and a broken pair of spectacles confirmed his guess and almost enabled him to re-clothe those poor bones in his mind's eye with the very flesh of the German professor which once covered them.

The balloon, which was still well inflated, had dragged its anchor amongst these rocks and at last struck a firm hold amongst them, and still, as they reached it, tugged and strained at its mooring with a semblance of life in ghastly contrast to the everlasting peace which had fallen upon its helmsman and master.

'The jerk when that there thing pulled up sudden

chucked him out, I guess,' said Dick, pointing at the bones; 'and look here, it's broke his arm in two places, and his thigh. Poor wretch, pity but what he didn't fall clear over the edge anyway !'

'That's not what he thought, Dick,' said Snap, who had picked up a log-book which lay by the dead man's side and bore on its cover of calf-skin more than one mark of the vulture's prying beak. '"Gott sei Dank," he begins—and it looks as if he had written it in his own blood, poor fellow—"thank God," he says, "that I shall have time to write——"'

'Yes, well, never mind that now, pard; I guess we'll have lots of time to read that by-and-by. There ain't much room up here, and I guess we'd better go as near giving this foreigner Christian burial as circumstances will allow; you don't happen to recollect a prayer as will suit, do you now, Snap?'

'What do you mean, Wharton? you can't dig a grave in this rock.'

'No, lad, I know that,' he replied, 'and I ain't goin' to try. But we've got to live here, maybe some days, and there's hardly room for us as are alive, even if dead men's society was as attractive as it ain't.'

Whilst he spoke the old man had approached the figure, which half lay, half sat, in the hollow, its limbs broken and its face torn away by birds of prey. Reverently the old man lifted his hat, saying to the thing at his feet :

'You'll forgive us, pard, but we're kinder cramped for room up here, and if so be as you're gone aloft a few thousand feet more or less between you and these bones of yourn won't make no odds.'

Snap looked at Dick in some horror, but the old man's manner was so reverent and yet so determined that he did not interfere.

Tearing a rug, which before his strength left him he must have got somehow or other from the car of the balloon, into fine strips, Dick spliced them together into a cord. Then he rolled the remains up in the long cloak in which they lay, wound his cord of strips round and round it, and then turned again to Snap :

' Snap, my lad, don't take on at what I'm doing,' he said ; ' there ain't no place for the dead among the living, nor can be neither. You don't believe as these bones is him, do you ? Very well, then, I want you to help me bury them down there,' and the foreman pointed out over the brink of the precipice.

The afternoon had passed now, and one or two stars were beginning to show faintly in the sky. Down below, the mists were rising thickly from the wet bottom-lands and from the bed of the stream, and were drifting through the gorges of the mountains and up and up, until, looking over from their dizzy stand, Dick and Snap saw nothing but heaving billows of heavy white clouds. It wanted but very little fancy to imagine that those clouds were white waves breaking round the base of the cliff on which they stood.

' Take the other end of the pack, Snap,' commanded Wharton ; ' now, boy, have you got a prayer handy ? '

' No, Dick,' faltered Snap, ' I don't know what to say.'

' Then just you do as I do,' said the old man, ' just say good-bye to the poor chap ; I remember a mate



'GOOD-BYE, PARD!'

told me years agone that good-bye meant "God be with you." I reckon that ain't a bad prayer.'

With his head averted the boy did as he was told.

'Good-bye,' said Dick, 'good-bye, pard!'—and 'good-bye' echoed Snap—their voices sounding faint and strange as they stood up there close to the stars, with the white clouds below and the dead man between them.

'Swing it, Snap, and let go,' said Wharton, and the boy's hands let go as the light burden which they bore flew outwards over the edge.

By some fascination which he could not resist Snap looked down, and saw the dreadful bale spin round and down with awful velocity, until as it plunged into the billowy clouds of mist for a moment he fancied an arm broke loose from its bandages and stretched up towards him as the body disappeared from view.

And then all was over. No sound came back to tell them that it had reached its resting-place. The stars stood still in the heavens, and Snap hated them for their cold, unsympathising stare. The granite rocks looked cold and hard and terrible, and the sky itself looked as hard and as merciless as the rocks.

A strong hand gripped Snap's shoulder at that moment, and a kind, strong voice was in his ear:

'Come out of that, lad; if you look over them rocks any longer they'll kinder draw you down after him.'

CHAPTER XXII

AT THE END OF THE ROPE

'I GUESS our young 'uns will be feeling as if the old birds had deserted,' said Dick after a time. 'How do you reckon to get them up, Snap?'

'Well, I've just been looking over the top of that other point,' said Snap, indicating one of the other points of the peak, 'and I find we can get down pretty easily to within about 150 feet of them, but from there down it's like ice, the rock is so smooth.'

'Let's see if we can pull this balloon in,' said Dick; 'may be, there is a rope in the car;' and as he spoke he and Snap got hold of the rope which held the captive balloon, and hauled on it. To their surprise it came in easily, though now and then it gave a tug which threatened to jerk them off their feet. When they had got it so close that they could see into the car Snap was on the point of getting in.

'Steady, boy, hold on! If you let go I may not be able to keep her down, and then there you'll be hung up like a bird in a cage,' roared Dick.

'Well, what are we going to do?' panted Snap.

'Just pay out the rope again steadily, pard; don't let it go with a jerk, whatever you do,' replied Wharton.

'And now?' asked Snap when the balloon was once more at the end of its tether.

'Now,' replied Dick, 'we'll make another halter for that there airy steed. Lend us the lariat.'

Taking off his belt, which fastened with a great metal hook, Wharton cut the latter off the belt and fastened it to one end of the lariat; the other end he made fast to a rock.

'Now, my lad,' said he, holding the hook in his teeth, 'haul him in again,' and, yo-ho-ing like sailors at the capstan, they soon had the balloon alongside.

'Bear on the rope with all your might, pard!' said Dick, leaning back and throwing all his weight on one hand, whilst with the other he hitched the hook at the end of the lariat into one of the ropes round the car.

'Now let go, you can let her rip! I guess she'll not break away from them moorings,' said Dick; 'and if you'll get in and look what there is inside you'll have no trouble in getting out again and no fear of being flown away with.'

In another minute Snap was in the car, and cried out to Dick: 'Hurrah! here is everything we want; heaps of rugs and two coils of rope; but it's very thin stuff,' he added.

'Chuck it out, my boy!' cried Wharton, and two coils of new yellow hemp came tumbling to his feet, followed by a buffalo-robe and two blankets.

'Four-point blankets!' remarked Dick, 'and a thirty-dollar robe, anyway. Is there anything else?'

'Yes,' replied the boy, 'some instruments—a dozen, I should think—a big flask, a big pipe, and a lot of

round tins of provisions with "Silver, Cornhill" on them.'

'Throw them down, Snap, I'll catch them,' cried Dick, 'and bring the pipe and the flask with you, and then we'll try to get to the boys.'

Snap obeyed, and in another minute swung himself out of the car and dropped beside his companion.

'It is pretty thin rope, this,' remarked Dick, handling one of the coils which Snap had thrown to him, 'but it seems uncommonly strong too. What is this, anyway?' he added, pointing to a thin red strand which ran through the rope.

Snap looked at it for a moment, and then, clapping his hand on Dick's shoulder, rejoined, 'We're right now, old chap; that is an Alpine Club rope, or at any rate made like them, and is as tough as wire. Whales wouldn't break it or razors cut it, never fear; if it's long enough we'll have Towzer and Frank up here in no time.'

By splicing the ropes together Snap found that he could just reach his friends, so that he and Dick started without more ado, and, climbing down the chimney again for some time, got on to its other wall, and thence to a point from which the rope could be lowered to Frank's crevice. As it hung for some time unnoticed by the boys, Dick began to fidget.

'I reckon they've gone to sleep. That Towzer's a holy terror for slumbering,' he remarked.

'They can't have fallen out, can they, Dick?' asked Snap anxiously.

'No, no, not they!' replied he; 'and I expect it's just because they don't want to that we don't get a bite

at our line. Swing it in a bit if you can; you see they daren't reach out for it.'

'True for you!' said Snap, and began vigorously to agitate the rope. But he soon found that it requires time and considerable skill to make the end of a rope 200 ft. long obey your bidding, and he was almost in despair, when the rope suddenly began as it were of itself to swing in the right direction.

'At last!' he ejaculated as the rope after swinging in a little further than usual failed to return.

On the end of the rope they had fastened a note to Towzer in these words: 'Tie Frank on to the line securely, give two tugs when you are ready, and let him swing out gently; we'll haul him up.'

It seems easy enough to do when you only read about it, but to a man crouching in a cranny in the rock, with thousands of feet of a sheer fall below him and no twig even for his hands to clutch, it is a terrible thing to tie the rope under his arms and let himself go out into space, one thin thread only connecting him with this world—a mere atom swinging helplessly in space. What if the rope should break? what if the friendly hands above should grow cramped, or even if their strength should fail for a moment? What? Why, only a short, sharp rush through the air, and then—long rest! The right way to manage such an ascent is, of course, to have a bar at the end of your rope. On this the person to be hauled up sits, one leg on either side of the rope, and face inwards, so that by touching the rock with the feet the climber may steer himself a little or at any rate resist that tendency to spin round like a roasting-jack which is so terrible.

Never did a rope take more adjusting than that rope round Frank. Towzer tried every knot and every strand again and again with desperate care. He felt that his brother's life depended on him, and when he said good-bye before giving those two terrible tugs the tears rushed to the poor boy's eyes and his hands clung to Frank's as if they would never leave them.

Up at the top, too, those two strong men were gazing anxiously into each other's faces. It was a long pull, and Frank a terribly heavy fellow. If he began to swing, could they get him up? It was a heavy responsibility, but one at least out of the two felt that, rather than let go of the rope which held the man whose life was entrusted to him, that rope should drag him too over the cliff to the hereafter.

And then the tugs came, sharp and firm, Frank's brave old fist giving them, and he even managed to make a poor little joke as he swung out, although he knew it was useless, for Towzer had turned and was cowering breathless, his eyes hidden against the back of the little cave. The young one felt as if his brother had gone to execution and his hand had sent him.

Steadily foot by foot the rope came home, the two men coiling it round a rough natural pillar of rock as they got it in, until they saw Frank's hands grip the top; and then with one great pull they dragged him roughly over, 'high and dry,' as Wharton said, out of the great deep. What matter if that last pull tore his clothes on the ragged granite and hurt his wounded arm? It was pleasant even to be hurt by the solid rock beneath you after dangling so long in mid-air.

Dick and Snap lay down, like dogs who have done

a hard day's work, flat on their bellies. Cold as it was, the perspiration poured from their faces and their limbs trembled with fatigue and excitement, so that they could not stand upright. To Frank they hardly spoke. By-and-by each came and shook hands in silence—that was all. Then Dick spoke:

'Snap, we must get young Towzer up; there are three now, and he is only a light weight.'

Carefully they overhauled every inch of the rope and then let it down again. This time it was soon caught, and they all stood back and waited for the tug. When it came they all hauled with a will.

'Why, he's no weight at all,' said Snap after taking in the first handful or two of slack rope.

'That's just it!' said Wharton, 'there is no one on the rope; you hold hard whilst I go and look,' and as he spoke Dick went to the edge and looked over.

'No!' he sang out, 'there's no one on; let the rope go again, there must be some mistake.'

Again the rope swung into the crevice, was caught, held, and returned, and again no one was on it.

This time the men hauled it up, thinking Towzer must have found some fault in the rope. All that they found was a note and these words: 'Dear Frank, forgive; I know I'm a little idiot, but I can't come. I should go mad if I saw myself hanging by that thread. I'll stay here until to-morrow, and then perhaps I can get down and up some other way. Don't mind me, it's awfully jolly here.—TOWZER.'

"Awfully jolly here!" poor little chap, he's got

the horrors, and if we leave him he'll go looking over until he can't help throwing himself down,' said Dick. 'Let's go to him, one of us.'

'No!' said Frank, and his voice sounded hard and cruel, and his fair skin was all aflame, 'we'll send this down, please; ' and with shaking hand he wrote: 'For shame, remember you are a Winthrop; will you let these fellows see that you are afraid?'

At his word the two sound men lowered the rope again, and this time when the tugs came there was a weight at the end of it—a weight that swung and spun and tried their strength more even than Frank had done. At last they dragged him to the top, and as his head came over the edge they looked to see his hands grip the ground, but in vain! Like a log he rolled on the top and lay there, his head hanging limply, like the head of a dead snowdrop, and Frank wrung his hands as he thought that his pride had killed 'the little one.'

'It's all right, pard, don't you take on like that,' said Wharton cheerfully; 'he's swooned away or gone to sleep with dizziness. He'll come round again directly.'

Picking the boy up gently, they got him across to the nest, as Dick called the hollow by the balloon.

'Better carry him like this than if he was awake and mad with fright, poor chap,' said Wharton; and then, when he had rolled his charge up in a buffalo-robe, and poured some spirits from the flask down his throat, he begged the other two to lie down and rest.

'We shall want all our strength if we mean living through the next few days,' said the old foreman, 'and I can't do with more nor one invalid at a time.'

By-and-by Towzer came round, but his eycs were wild and his mouth twitched, so that he could hardly speak distinctly. Wharton noticed Frank's face as he watched his brother, and, coming over to him, he laid a great knotted fist on the elder Winthrop's shoulder :

'Look here, my lad,' he said, 'I saw what you wrote, and I let it go, because I knowed that if we didn't get the boy up to-night we'd never see him again : but don't you get thinking hard things about your brother. He's got grit enough for anything. Pluck's a matter of constitootion, and his is just upon played out. He'll be better when he has had some grub and a sleep. Now give us a match,' and, selecting one from the bundle offered to him, he solemnly lifted a leg, rubbed the match smartly on the seat of his trousers, and applied it to the bottom of one of the provision tins before alluded to.

'Well,' Snap said, 'that's ingenious ; how did you know how to manage them ?'

'How ?' replied Dick, 'I guess if you'd lived the life I have you'd know all a man *can* know about tinned meat. Why, blow me if I don't think you could start a dividend-paying tin-mine where we first lived when we started ranching on the Rosebud, and all the tin you'd ever find there came outside our grub.'

'Oh, I've seen tinned meats before, Dick,' answered Snap, 'but a tinned fire to cook it by, that's what gets over me.'

The tin in question was an ingenious contrivance with a roll of wick saturated with spirit underneath the tin pot, which held (in this instance) an excellent curried fowl. A roll of soft lead covers the saturated wick, and

all the traveller has to do is to tear off the lead and light the wick. In ten minutes' time the curry will be ready, and if then he is not satisfied with his supper the traveller must be very hard to please. Whoever invented these ingenious tins deserves a monument to be erected to his memory by the hunters, travellers, mountaineers, and others whom he has fed.

After doing substantial justice to the fare before them, or, as Dick put it, 'after wolfig two of them tins,' and drinking more whisky neat than they had ever done at one sitting before, even Towzer began to recover. But Dick wouldn't hear of his talking, and at the first attempt rolled him up in a buffalo-rug and, sitting solemnly down on his legs, lit the great pipe of the German professor.

In ten minutes, to all intents and purposes, Dick was alone, for, though the bodies of the three boys breathed at his side, their minds were far away in the land of dreams and slumber. For some time the old man puffed away in silence—the stars above winking solemnly down at him as he kept that one bright spark alight with infinite care, close to the end of his nose.

'I'm jiggered if I don't think they're a-laughin' at us,' he muttered, looking at the stars, 'and I don't wonder. It's been a pretty tough job gettin' here, but how we're goin' to get out beats me. Howsomdever, Dick, my lad, bed!—bed-rock it is, my hearty!' and, grumbling and growling, he poked his finger into his pipe, extinguished the ashes, and crawled under a corner of Towzer's robe.

CHAPTER XXIII

READING THE WILL

A SUDDEN rushing wind struck Snap upon the cheek, and he awoke ; awoke with a smell of carrion in his nostrils and a dark cloud floating over his eyes. As he sprang to his feet it was gone, but the view that suddenly confronted him—the narrow bed on which he had slept, and the yawning abyss beneath—made him reel and stagger with horror. Recovering himself as his faculties came back from dreamland, he heard a harsh ‘ croak ! croak ! ’ and saw the cloud which had broken his slumbers floating, on wings which scarcely moved, round and round the summit, turning its ugly head enquiringly towards him every time it passed.

‘ You fiend ! ’ he muttered, shaking his fist at the raven, ‘ I wonder, after the hundred years you’ve lived about this peak and its graveyards, that you don’t know a live man from a dead one ; perhaps that will teach you,’ and as the bird came by again he hurled a lump of granite at it with an accuracy and energy which would not be denied.

The stone caught the bird full, and sounded hollow on its great wing. For a moment it staggered, and two black feathers fluttered ever so slowly down, until it made Snap sick to watch them going, going, as if they

never would stop ; but the raven righted himself, and with a fierce croak sailed on out of sight.

‘Sounded as if he was a cursing of you, didn’t it, Snap ?’ said Wharton’s voice at the boy’s side ; ‘a nice old party he is ! But I wish we had his wings.’

‘Yes, Dick,’ replied Snap, ‘even without those two pen-feathers I knocked out of him.’

‘If Warwolf had seen you do that,’ remarked Wharton, ‘he would never have been happy again. That bird is “Great Medicine” with the Blackfeet.’

‘Great humbug,’ retorted Snap indignantly.

‘Just so, that’s the way as I always translate it myself,’ replied the foreman ; ‘but I say, I wonder if Warwolf got clear away ?’

‘I hope he did,’ said Snap, ‘I should like to see the poor old Cradle again.’

‘What, that horse ?’ answered Dick ; ‘wal, if the chief didn’t get clear away, I reckon neither you nor me will want any hoss again.’

‘No, I suppose not, Dick,’ replied Snap grimly ; ‘I wonder if these chaps realise what a corner we are in,’ he added, pointing over his shoulder to his sleeping comrades.

‘Frank may,’ said Dick ; ‘I’m not rightly certain whether the young ‘un understands anything yet.’

‘What do you mean, Dick ? you don’t mean that he has gone off his head, do you ?’ replied Snap a little vaguely.

‘He wasn’t sane when we pulled him up yesterday, but may be he’ll be all right to-day,’ was the answer, and at that moment the object of their solicitude woke and sat up.

'Is that you, Dick?' asked Towzer's voice feebly.

'Yes, my lad, that's me. Don't you try to get up yet, you've been a bit ill. Mustn't let him look over that edge yet at any price,' he whispered aside to Snap.

'Lie still, old fellow,' added Snap soothingly as he bent over him, 'how do you feel?'

'Oh, only a bit faint and as if I was sea-sick, Snap,' he replied, 'but I've had such a dreadful dream.'

Snap didn't ask him what it was, he guessed that the boy half remembered yesterday's experiences; but Towzer went on addressing Frank, who was now sitting up beside him.

'I dreamed,' he said, 'that I was a coward, that you called me one, Frank, and then they put me on a roasting-jack for a punishment, and hung me on to the bottom of the world, and I went round and round and round—'

'Here, dry up that soft talk,' interposed Dick roughly, 'we don't want no talk of dreams here: you get a knife into that tin, Towzer, and let's have breakfast,' and, so saying, the old man handed the boy a tin of meat and a knife, 'just to prevent him thinking,' as he explained later on.

'I think he is all right now,' said Frank after breakfast, 'let's tell him a little; we can't go on like this.'

'Very well, but take care how you do it,' assented Dick.

Then they told him, not all, but most of that last day's doings, concluding with: 'And when we got you on the rope you must have bumped your head against the rock, or spun round until you went nearly silly and fainted; and so now you must keep quiet and

promise not to look over the edge again until we give you leave. Is that a bargain ?'

'Yes,' sighed Towzer, 'I suppose it is; but I must be a terrible nuisance to you fellows. What a little brute you must think me !'

All that day and the next the boys lay in their narrow bed watching the sun rise and set, and the clouds go hurrying by. Sometimes a few rugged brown clouds would drift up, and then a little flurry of wind and rain would almost wash them out of their exposed position, while the balloon creaked and strained at her moorings in an alarming fashion.

'Snap,' said Dick on the second day, 'them Injuns can't see the balloon from below, and they're getting more daring, now they think the great bird has gone.'

'How is that, Dick?' asked Snap.

'Well, you see we have drawn the balloon out of sight by mooring it close alongside among these crags. Leastways I reckon that's so, for the Crows have come out of cover. Look for yourself.'

Peering over the little parapet which ran round their resting-place, Snap could see camp-fires on the prairie below, and through his glasses he made out a line of sentries set all round the foot of the mountain, not near it, but still hemming it in in such a way that escape from it across the open prairie to the forest beyond the camp-fires was impossible.

'They know that we're trapped,' said Frank, 'and mean to starve us out, though they are still afraid to put foot on the mountain.'

'That's so,' replied Wharton, 'and young Towzer is opening the last tin of meat but one. It must be

only one tin between four to-night, and if Warwolf doesn't bring his Blackfeet to-morrow we had better try to run the gauntlet, and get away separately to-morrow evening before hunger makes us too weak to fight.'

'It wouldn't do, Dick,' whispered Snap, drawing him aside, 'Towzer could never get down the mountain, and even if Frank got through he could never find his way in the forest. But I have a better idea than that.'

'What is it, lad?' asked Wharton.

'Never mind yet, old fellow, it will keep,' replied the boy; 'besides, I'm not quite sure yet if it is practicable, and if Warwolf turns up I would much rather not try it. But look here,' he added, turning to the others, 'I've got some interesting reading in this poor old German's log-book.'

'Let us have it after dinner, Snap,' said Frank.

'Them's my sentiments exactly,' put in Dick; 'I never can hear reading comfortably unless I've got a pipe in my mouth.'

So after dinner, that is after everyone had played as long as he could with his small share of the last tin but one, Snap took the book and read, whilst Dick smoked a double allowance of tobacco to console his ill-used stomach for the loss of at least three-fourths of his share of the curry, which the good old chap had managed to add to the boys' portions unobserved.

'I don't call it kinder fair on you, boys,' he remarked, 'my doing all the smoking; won't you try a pull? it's wonderfully satisfying.'

Snap took the offered pipe and enjoyed the first

few whiffs immensely, but, as he remarked, 'almost at once struck ile.'

'Thank you, Dick, kindly,' he said, handing the pipe back hurriedly, 'but I think my jaw will work without oiling. I'd rather read and see you smoke.'

Dick laughed and resumed his pipe, while Snap read as follows:

"Sunday, 15.—Thank God, I have still an arm left to write. It is I who am in fault. The balloon was by me too suddenly stopped, and I was at once outthrown, and my leg and arm altogether broken—"

'Then there is a stop, as if the pen had fallen from his hand,' said Snap.

'Fainted from pain, I guess,' said Dick, taking his pipe out of his mouth and blowing away a lot of little rings of smoke.

This was a favourite trick of Dick's, and you might see him often send three rings one through the other in succession.

'The next entry is the 17th, and it is a long one,' continued the reader. '"I know right well," he writes, "that I cannot much longer stay. The end must soon come. Ach Gott ! how it will good be. Now hear I, day and night, the roaring of the winds of heaven, like the beating of surf on the shore. If it were not that my limbs were so heavy with pain, these winds would snatch me from my hard couch and give me back to my native earth and peace. Ah me ! how the clouds spin, and the peak keeps bending, bending— I have had no food since my fall and die of hunger and weakness. God grant I die before that foul black bird, which comes croaking

nearer and nearer, tears my eyes out ! But I think death is very near now, the pain is gone, and I can think clearly. I have one work to do, and then I die peacefully. Some man may find me—when, God knows ; who he will be, He too knows—but, as He has put a thing into my mind, I would leave it to my brother men. It is this. In the small box, A, in the ear of the balloon, is a paper. This paper contains a design for steering balloons. All my life I have sought this, now have I found it—too late. Henceforth the air shall be as navigable as the sea or the dry land. But I would have this design patented and to bear my name. So much earthly ambition clings to me still. Take, then, thou, who mayest find these bones, this box, A, to Professor von Bulberg of Berlin. There it shall be patented in my name. I would have the honour ; and for your service, since I have no kin, I leave you as reward whatever I may die possessed of, here or in Potsdau : here, a few priceless instruments ; there, a little house or two, I think, and, should there be any, half the proceeds of this my invention ; the other half to go to the Royal Society of Aéronauts, Berlin."

‘ By Jove ! ’ said Snap at this point, ‘ it is just as well that he had no more to write ; if he had, I could not have read it, although his shaky hand is very sharp and clear ; but it is shaky towards the end—just look at it,’ and he passed it to Frank.

‘ What luck it is that you took up German instead of Greek, Snap ! ’ said Frank.

‘ Well, I don’t know,’ replied he, ‘ we could have read it anyhow. Here is another paper, in another

language, which I found tucked under him when we lifted him up.' And, so saying, the boy handed his companions the following :



‘Let’s have a look at that,’ said Dick, stretching his arm out for the paper. When he had studied it a little the old foreman handed it back again to Snap, saying :

‘That’s downright smart of the German : it’s not the first time as he’s been amongst Injuns ; I call that a lot easier to read than your pothooks and up-and-down strokes, don’t you, Snap ?’

‘Well, it’s not difficult, certainly. I suppose he means, if the Indian takes Box A to any gentleman in a beard, breeches, and sombrero, he will get rum and a rifle ; if, on the other hand, he runs off with Box A, the attractive-looking person with a spear will make it hot for him—isn’t that it ?’ replied Snap.

‘That’s so, sonny !’ replied Wharton, delighted at Snap’s intelligence, ‘and, as Injuns don’t generally wear beards, breeches, or sombreros, that chap in the pictur’ is a white man. The fellow with a bear’s head and a spear is Okeeheedee, the devil of the Blackfeet.’

‘Well, if we ever get away we must try to take the poor fellow’s box and send it to Professor Bulberg at Berlin, though I don’t expect to become a millionaire out of my share of the profits under his will,’ said Snap.

‘Your share ! Why, if there was any to take, Snap, it would be all yours, of course,’ remonstrated Towzer.

‘You don’t understand, dear boy,’ replied Snap. ‘In the Bull Pine Firm we have all things in common —fresh air and famine, for instance, just at present—and, as we all got here about the same time, we shall all

be equally entitled under the will, as my uncle in the Temple would say ; isn't that right, Dick ?'

'Wal, share and share alike is prairie law, when you do make a find,' Wharton answered, 'but I'd sell my share for a sight of Rosebud and a square meal of beans and bacon right now !'

After a pause the little party crept to the edge of their nest and, looking over, could see the Indian watch-fires glowing in the gathering gloom of night. Long columns of blue smoke rose up among the pines, and a camp like the camp of an army was pitched on the edge of the prairie.

'I doubt if Warwolf would do much good even if he did get through,' said Wharton. 'Those Crows we put up have just gone back to the fishing-camp and brought the whole tribe about our heels. There are a couple of hundred men there, if there is one.'

No one had an answer to make to this speech, so they all lay there watching. It seemed such a strangely cruel lot to be hung like Mahomet's coffin halfway between heaven and earth, cut off from both—still alive, and yet beyond reach of the living. Surely no sailor on a desert island was ever so deserted as they; he at least could swim in the element which hemmed him in, but for them there was no way of escape. It was doubtful even whether the strongest of them could ever climb down the way they came. For the other two such a feat was certainly impossible. And what could swim in the element which closed them in ? The eagle, and the raven, and—

Snap stopped thinking, and broke the silence.

'Dick, there is only one way out of this, and we've

got to try it. We can't stay here and starve,' he said.

'Not pleasant, is it?' replied Wharton; 'but what are we going to do? We can't eat bed-rock and we can't fly.'

'Yes, we can,' was Snap's unexpected answer, 'at least that balloon can; and if you are game we'll try it to-morrow.'

'What! go up in that thing? not I, sonny,' replied the old cowboy; 'I don't mind your hanging me out on a clothes-line again over them rocks if so be as you think my constitution requires it, but I'll be dog-goned if I'll go up in that thing.'

Now, 'dog-goned' was a rare expression with Dick and was generally supposed by his friends to mean that he had issued an ultimatum. If in the old days at the ranche he had said that he would be 'dog-goned' if So-and-so shouldn't git next day, you might as well say good-bye to So-and-so, for next morning, 'bright and early,' he invariably 'got.' So, then, this rebellion of Dick's was rather a formidable thing, and one not to be treated lightly.

Snap tried to argue with the old man, but it was useless. Reason against prejudice never had much chance. Dick never had been a 'blooming balloonatic,' he said, and didn't 'kinder cotton to becoming one now.'

'Well, Dick,' said Snap, 'it's just this. If we stay here it means death—a long, lingering, painful death. If we try the balloon, of course it may drop us like a stone, and then that's death too, but a quick, painless one. We should be dead before we got to the bottom.'

'That's right enough, lad,' persisted Wharton, 'but if that is all that you are hankering after who is to hinder your jumping over the edge here—that's death too, a pretty certain one, and painless, says you!'

'Quite so, Dick, but I don't think the balloon would let us down. Why should it? There is a lot of ballast in. We'll throw that out, and then away we go sailing over the heads of these Redskins until somewhere or other we come softly and slowly down again, safe and sound, and out of danger. I can't think why we have stayed here so long,' Snap concluded, having succeeded, as many a man has done before, in talking himself into belief in his own scheme.

'I'm not a-goin' to say, Snap,' said Dick slowly, 'as there ain't something in your idea; but sailing in that thing don't seem natural to me somehow. Howsoever, if we can't get away before this time tomorrow in any other way, you boys can try it if you like, and I'll jest try to wriggle through them reptiles down below in my own way.'

And that was the most the boys could get out of Dick, and with it they had to be content: though Snap had not the least intention of going without the old man. 'All or none' was his motto, and he meant to stick to it.

CHAPTER XXIV

SNAP'S SACRIFICE

THAT night Snap slept little. Whenever he closed his eyes visions of Fairbury floated before them, and of that kind, sweet face, with eyes shining through their tears—the one face which had always had a smile for him, which was always ready to confront those who said ‘That young Hales is a thorough ne'er-do-well, he'll never be good for anything, mark my words.’ *She* had always believed in him ; had always trusted her boys with him, though the neighbours shook their heads and thought, as one old lady said, ‘that those dear lambs would never come to any good with that boy, always fighting and disgracing himself.’ And then, when the expulsion from Fernhall had thrown his guardian into a white heat of virtuous indignation, and even dear old Admiral Chris had looked askance, it was the same little woman who had drawn out the whole story, had tried to look serious over it, and finally re-told it to her brother in such a way that that old warrior had forgotten his gout and roared with laughter till it sounded as if a gale was blowing.

Always Mrs. Winthrop. Whenever he opened his eyes there was the great white balloon quivering and poising in the moonlight ; and whenever he closed

them there was the face of the woman who had been more than a mother to him, who had put every good thought into his mind, and helped him, ever since he could remember, to grow up a gentleman. And round him lay her sons, and in his heart he knew that next to God she trusted him for their safety.

Getting up softly, he climbed into the car of the balloon, which rocked like a cradle as he sat in it. The addition of his weight made no perceptible difference to it, except perhaps to steady it. He noticed, as he sat there alone among the clouds, that, besides the box A, there were quite a dozen heavy little parcels in the car—scientific instruments for taking astronomical observations, and such like. Besides these there were a number of lumps of what appeared to be lead or iron, used obviously for ballast. Altogether, Snap thought, there was a good deal to throw out, and even four such men as Frank might possibly not be too much for the balloon. If the crew eventually appeared to be too heavy, why, then Dick and he must try to climb down, whilst the two Winthrops trusted to the ship of the sky.

That there had been a considerable escape of gas from the balloon Snap saw only too plainly ; its outlines were no longer full, rounded curves, as they should have been. In places there was a deplorable flatness and falling away from the true lines of beauty. Still, knowing very little of these things, Snap thought it might do, and crept back a good deal consoled to his lair alongside Dick Wharton.

That old hero slept, like the proverbial weasel, with one eye open.

' Been overhaulin' that craft of yourn, Snap ? ' he whispered.

' Yes, Dick,' the boy answered in the same low tones, ' and I think she will do.'

The old fellow lay back again for a few minutes, and then began again :

' I've been thinking, Snap,' he said.

' Yes ? ' interrupted Snap, ' perhaps you have ; I should get a better chance of sleeping if you didn't think so loud.'

' Never mind, sonny, I dare say I do breathe a bit hard at times, but I never knowed a "high-blower" yet as wasn't a good horse ; what I was a-goin' to say is that if you mean goin' in that consarn I'll come along. If you ever did get down again to prairie level, you'd be like babies without Dick Wharton to tote you round.'

Snap was not going to argue about his reasons, it was enough for him that his old friend would come ; so he sat up and shook hands upon it, clinching the bargain there and then.

Another day dawned, and saw the sun rise up and sink far towards the west again, before old Wharton gave up all hope of relief. He had been peering steadily down on the encampment for a couple of hours before he turned to Snap with :

' Sonny, it's got to be done. Them Redskins have almost got over their skeer, and I guess poor Warwolf has been tortured and scalped by this time.'

' Yes, Dick,' said Snap quietly ; ' then suppose we get ready.'

' Why, what is there to do, pard, except get right in and go ? ' asked his companion.

'Well, first of all we must try whether the balloon will carry us all. She certainly won't unless we take some of the cargo out.'

'All right, bear a hand, Towzer. You are boss of this show, Snap,' was the reply.

Snap climbed into the car and handed out the instruments and a bag or two of sand; the balloon straining wildly at its moorings as he did so.

'Come in with me, Frank,' he cried, 'and help me steady her.'

Frank climbed in.

'Now, Towzer!' Snap added; and Towzer joined the other two.

'That is very nearly a load, I think,' said Snap, 'and there won't be much fear of our going up too high when Dick gets in.'

'No,' said Frank, 'we had better throw out something more.'

'Very well,' said Snap, throwing out everything he could lay his hands on, 'but if it won't carry us now I don't know what we shall do. Come on, Dick.'

Dick stepped in, and still the balloon strained upwards.

'She'll fly all right,' cried Towzer.

'Then cut the cord and take care that you don't roll out,' commanded Snap.

The cord was cut, and suddenly the earth and the mountain peak began to recede from the balloon. At least so it seemed to the boys. As for the balloon, it seemed exactly poised in the air, steady as an eagle on widespread wings, and even as they sat and gazed

the earth drew back and faded until it was gone, and they hung alone, in a sad and absolute silence, whither no voice of bird or insect ever penetrated.

The boys were smitten as it were with dumbness. No one spoke, though, strangely enough, no fear possessed them—only a great stillness and peace. The balloon had now apparently reached that point at which it could rest in equilibrium, and hung motionless over the peak from which the boys had risen. The cold had grown intense, and the evening was approaching, though the sun's rays still spread colour through the great cloudland below them. At last Frank broke the silence :

' What is this, Snap,' he said, ' floating round the car ? ' and he drew in his hand covered with minute fragments of ice.

' It looks like powdered ice,' replied Snap.

' I don't much fancy this country to winter in,' broke out Dick ; ' I suppose, Snap, you couldn't get this craft of yours to go down a bit, could you ? '

Even as Wharton spoke the balloon seemed to have heard him, or at any rate the clouds seemed to be drawing nearer, and the storm of ice-morsels grew thicker.

' I guess this ice, or snow, or hoar-frost, or whatever it is, won't make our shay any lighter,' remarked Dick ; ' do you see how it rests on the car and seems to thicken round the balloon ? '

' Yes,' said Frank, ' and if it rests on the edge of the car what must it do on the broad top of the balloon ? '

' Dick,' whispered Snap at this moment, ' what is

that?' and he pointed to the side of the great bubble above them, from which a long wreath of thin white smoke was trailing into space.

Dick looked.

'I'm blowed if I know,' he replied.

'Then I'll tell you,' Snap hissed in his ear: 'the balloon has sprung a leak, that is the gas escaping; the weight of this stuff' (touching the snow) 'on the top has done it, and we are going down fast enough even to suit you. Out with that sack of ballast,' he added, and Wharton and Frank sent the only sand-bag over the side.

This sent the balloon up again a little way, but they were now comparatively near the earth. Round them a regular snow-storm was raging. The particles of ice which they had met with in the higher layer of atmosphere had now gathered into snowflakes. The storm, such as it was, lasted but a few minutes, and then the sinking sun lit up the scene below them.

As they looked down, the boys saw a great billowy ocean of thick, rosy fog. Wave upon wave it seemed to roll, opaque, soft, and beautiful in colour, and as they looked it came up and up to meet them. The snow upon the top of the balloon was still too heavy for them, and they were sinking fast. In another minute the car was engulfed in the rosy clouds, which were already turning to a more sombre colour, and later on changed from rose to purple, and then to sullen grey.

As the balloon passed out of fog-land the sun set, and a quick darkness began to settle on the land. All sounds of the earth had long since been plain to them:

indeed, when in the fog, it seemed as if every sound was right alongside. Now they could see as well as hear. They were comparatively close to the earth, much nearer than they had been for days. They were skimming over the prairie some 1,500 feet from the ground, and drifting straight to the Indian encampment, sliding as it were down a gentle descent, the end of which seemed likely to be right amongst the enemy's watch-fires.

'Dick,' cried Snap, 'if we don't lighten the balloon we are lost. She is going to settle right amongst the Crows.'

'Well, sonny, there's only our clothes left to throw away now. I don't mind sacrificing my hat and boots,' said Dick, and, suiting the action to the word, he denuded himself of everything except his flannel shirt and trousers. All followed his example.

'Wal,' he remarked, 'I never knowed it rain ready-made clothes afore. Perhaps them Injuns didn't neither.'

'It hasn't done us much good either, Dick,' said Frank, 'I fancy we are still sinking.'

'We are,' replied Snap; 'but if we could only manage to clear their camp and fall a mile or two beyond them in the forest I should be content to take my chance. We can't hope for much more, I am afraid, now.'

Much more?' muttered Towzer, 'I shouldn't much care if we did fall amongst the Crows, if they would give us something to eat before scalping us.'

Even at this supreme moment Towzer was true to his schoolboy instincts: as for the others, they had

almost forgotten their hunger in the excitement of the scenes which they were passing through.

At this moment they heard a loud shouting in the Indian camp. They were dashing backwards and forwards among the tents, horses were being caught, and the wild yells of the bloodthirsty savages rang in their ears.

'Encouraging sort of welcome to mother earth, isn't it?' said Snap.

'It's strange too,' added Wharton; 'of course they've seen us and know we are dropping like a ripe plum into their mouths, but I wonder at their making such a noise about it. It's not like 'em!'

'Snap,' said Frank, 'I think we can sell them now. If you fellows tied me up a little so as to help my bad arm, we could all hold on to the ring above the car or the cords it is fastened to, and cut the car adrift.'

I suppose most of my readers have seen a big balloon—if not, a word of explanation may be necessary here. The body of the balloon is, of course, a great sack or bag of some excessively fine and light material, such as silk, or layers of india-rubber, between sheets of linen covered with thick coats of varnish. Over the balloon is a kind of net-work of rope. This is its harness and comes to a point towards the bottom, where all the ropes are attached to a great wooden hoop, from which again hang the ropes to which the car itself is attached. Frank's idea was to climb up into the ring and cut the car adrift.

'You've hit the nail on the head, my lad, plum centre this time,' said Wharton, 'but can you get up to the ring yourself?'

'I'll try,' replied Frank, 'but there isn't a moment to lose. Give me a hand, Towzer.'

Between them the others got Frank up into the rigging of the balloon, and tied him securely to the ring, so that he would not be entirely dependent upon his one arm for support.

'Are you all right?' cried Snap from his perch.

'All right, old chap.'

'All right,' came the answers.

'Then cut the ropes near you all together, so as not to drag the balloon over on one side,' he cried.

'Now!'

Each boy sawed away at the ropes near him with a will, but old Dick did not get his rope cut through quite as soon as the others. The result was that the balloon gave a furious plunge, and then, as the last rope broke, righted herself and darted upwards once more.

Snap looked white and scared, but the colour came back to his face when he saw all his comrades in their places, and old Wharton chimed in with :

'Dang me if this here balloon has'nt got all the vices of a cayuse, and more. Loses its wind and wants to stop, leastways come down, and then, as for bucking, a half-broke cayuse is a fool to it!'

For a while the balloon sailed along on a higher level, but all the time the thin wreath of white vapour marked a leak and a constant escape of gas. Besides this, the evening damp collected and settled on the envelope of the balloon, and all tended to weigh it down.

'We are sinking again,' cried Towzer, 'sinking

faster than ever before. Look how the prairie is rushing up to meet us!' and indeed it seemed so, and there was absolutely nothing left to throw out.

'Wal, you may as well go too,' said Dick with a sigh, and he drew his revolver from his breast and dropped this his most precious possession to the earth.

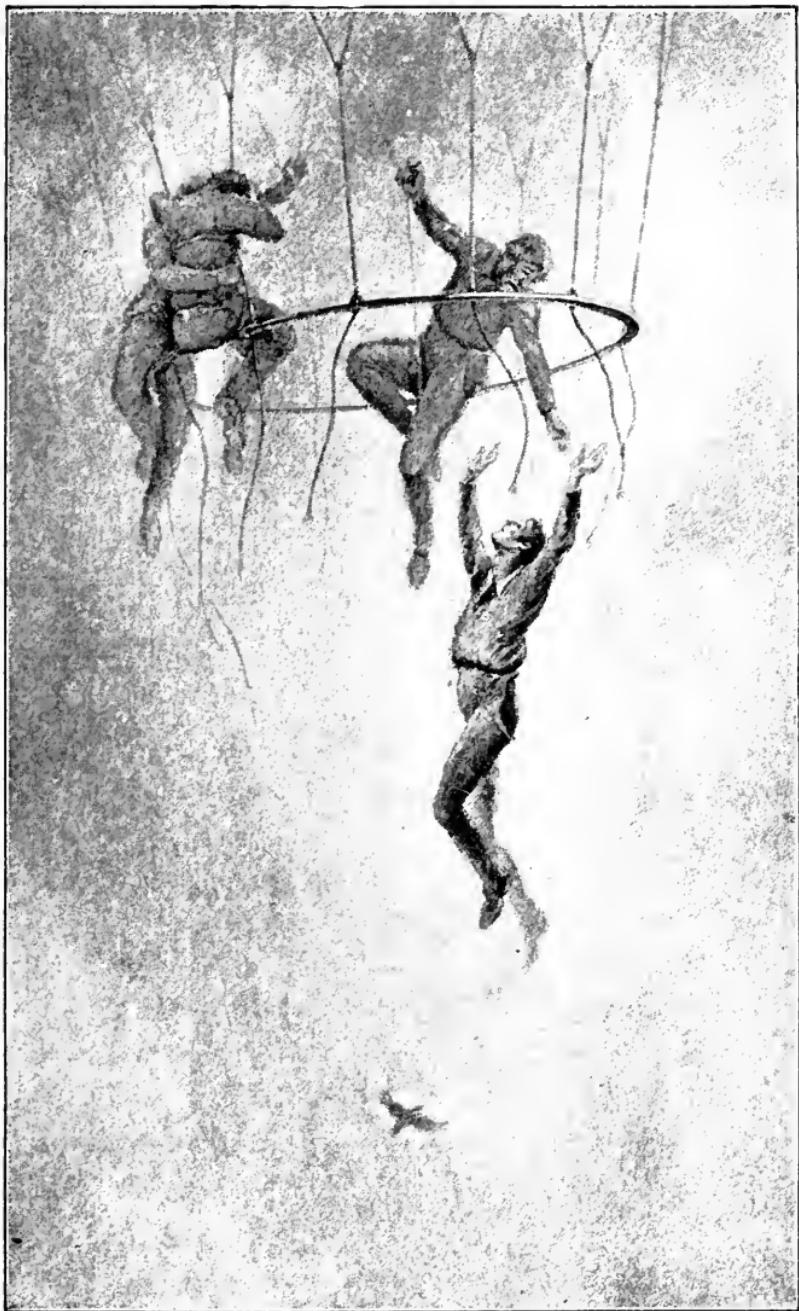
The boys looked at it as it shot downwards swift and straight, swifter and straighter than a skylark falls, and they thought of what might any moment be their own lot, and it made the boldest of them grip the ropes with fresh energy.

'Dick,' said Snap, 'in another five minutes at most we shall drop right among the Crows. They are so still now that one might fancy no one was in camp, but there are the fires, and I can even in this gloom make out the tops of the teepees. I wish something would break the silence to tell us how far we are from the ground.'

'Yes, pard,' replied Dick, 'one can't see much through this mist.'

'If there was not such a crowd of them waiting for us,' said Frank, 'this fog might give us our best chance of escape.'

'Listen!' said Dick, 'if we do come down amongst them, do each of you run for your lives, and each one in a different direction. If anyone gets safely through, let him try to make off to the dead-wood track and hide where Snap fell down until he can get a chance of getting clear back to Rosebud. But it ain't no good talking,' he muttered with a sigh, 'who is a-goin' to get through that crowd of Crows without even



SNAP'S SACRIFICE

a six-shooter? Great Scott! if we could only get beyond 'em in this mist!' he added.

'Yes, we could slip them well if we did, and all would be saved?' said Snap in a questioning tone, with a strange little shake in his voice which no one ever noticed before. 'Do you think, Dick, you could get us all back to Rosebud if we did drift by the camp in this fog to-night?' he asked again.

'Sure, lad! but what's the good of talking?' he replied.

'No, it isn't, Dick,' said Snap, his face strangely white and drawn, and the big brown eyes looking misty and dim; 'but if any of us do get through (it will be over in a minute now) let the others tell the story at home. Frank, old boy, give the mother my love; tell her Snap did his best.'

The voice was so strange (there was almost a sob in it) that all three turned their eyes from the scene below—the approaching tents and fires, right below them—to Snap. It was too late! As they turned they saw him slip from his seat on the ring; for one moment the strong brown hands clung to it, the brave face looked at them; the fearless lips murmured 'Good-bye, save them Dick!' and then the balloon sprang up again, and, as poor, half-maddened Wharton said, 'twelve stone of the bravest flesh as God ever put breath into' dropped through the darkness, there was a faint thud, heard even by those in the rapidly rising balloon, and Snap had done his duty. He had given his life for his friends. More than that no man can do.

CHAPTER XXV

FLIGHT OF THE CROWS

UP and up went the balloon. Twelve stone is a heavy weight to be freed from, and the great globe of gas and silk and cord soared upwards like a bird. Beneath it, in the strange grey light which had come in these higher regions of air with the evening, three human beings still clung to life, although for the moment all its sweetness seemed gone for them. A minute ago a strong, resolute leader was with them, and now their scared white faces stared and stared at the empty place on the hoop, at the cords his hands had held ; but his place was empty, no sound came from above or below, the majesty and the sadness of night and the high places of the earth were around them, and the familiar earth and hope were out of reach and out of sight.

‘Ah, Snap, it is well with you,’ was perhaps the thought uppermost in each one’s heart as the dread stillness reigned around and the cold grew, while a faintness and dizziness began to creep over them. In another minute, had nothing been done to prevent their further ascent, it is probable that Dick and Towzer would have been whirling downwards through thousands of feet of air, until Nature’s law had been

obeyed and earth had reached earth again. As for Frank, tied to the ring and the ropes of the balloon, he had already succumbed, owing probably to his weakness and recent loss of blood, and his nerveless hands were hanging, like his head, weak and unconscious. If brother and friend had fallen he would not have known, but would have rushed higher and higher as the balloon shook off its human load.

Luckily, old Wharton's frame was as tough as steel. Years of a trapper's life, long, lonely nights with the cattle, had hardened him until he hardly felt the cold and scarcely knew fatigue. Rousing himself from the stupor into which Snap's death had thrown him, his quick eyes took in everything.

'Save 'em, Dick, was what he said,' muttered the old man; 'is this saving of 'em, you old fool?'

'Young 'un!' he cried, and a voice which came from the inside of the balloon replied, 'Young 'un!'

They were too high for earth echoes, but his voice was returned to him as it were by the devil that was bearing them away. For so Dick now considered the balloon. It had been their toy and their slave. Men had given it life, they had trusted themselves to it, and now the treacherous fiend had them in its grip and mocked at their puny powers and impotent wills.

'Young 'un,' he cried again, 'which is the rope as he said we was to pull if we wanted to go down?'

'This,' said Towzer dreamily, looking at one of which he had hold.

'Pull it, then, for dear life!' roared Wharton, and a mocking echo came back: 'for dear life!'

'You devil!' cried the old man, his heavy black brows gathering together like a thunder-cloud, 'I'd let your steam out if I'd my six-shooter here.'

'Can't you pull it, Towzer?'

'No, Dick,' said the boy dreamily, 'my arm is too weak, and I can hardly hold on with the other.'

Shifting his seat rapidly, careless of all risk to himself, even at this height from the earth, Wharton reached the boy's side, and, putting one strong arm round him and the rope he clung to, with the other tugged furiously at the gas-valve. The change of Dick's position upset the balloon's equilibrium, and it was a sufficiently horrible sight to see Frank's apparently lifeless body hanging towards them from the opposite side of the ring, limp and helpless, whilst above them leaned the great balloon, the gas going out now with quite a perceptible whistle. It was very soon evident that their upward course had been stayed, and in another minute that they were sinking again fast—too fast, Dick feared, and shut off steam as he called it.

'Are you better now, Towzer?' he asked.

'Yes, Dick, I'm all right now, but I felt very weak a minute ago, and my hand was numb,' replied the boy.

'Hold on while I tie you in,' said Dick, and, unfastening the faithful lariat from his waist, he made the young one safe to the balloon.

'Now you look out for yourself,' he said. 'I'm going round to Frank; he is coming round a bit, and when we get together this brute of a thing will heel over again; so look out,' and, so saying, he edged his way round to Frank.

'Are we going down again, Dick?' he asked feebly.

'Yes, sonny,' replied the old man.

'Tell Towzer to pull the rope; let's go down to Snap and die, if necessary, but don't go up there again,' and an expression of horror indescribable grew in Frank's upward glance.

'We're a-goin' down pretty smart now, sonny!' said Wharton; 'here, give yourself a hoist-up. There, that's better,' he said, as Frank reached a sitting posture on the ring again.

It seemed almost as if, at last, a spirit of peace had entered into the great creature above them. The air was brilliantly clear now, and the first faint stars had come out. Down, down, the balloon kept going, but steadily and evenly. The mists had cleared away now, and in the starlight our voyagers could see the earth spread out like a great map beneath them. It all looked level—almost hollow—as they looked down upon it, and by no means gave them the idea of being part of a solid sphere.

The balloon must have risen into a current of strong wind, for in the short time since they had risen from over the Indian encampment they had passed over the forest-belt and were now descending upon the prairie by the river whereon the Crows used to have their autumn camp, until the Spirit of the Lone Mountain appeared and frightened them away. From point to point it must have been a distance of twenty miles, but what is that to a machine which has been known to travel at the rate of ninety miles an hour? Dick could not help ex-

claiming, when he saw the distance which they had passed over :

'If you could only break these here critters to stop when you want 'em to, and to be a bit handy in turning, I reckon there would be a considerable fall in railway shares.'

'Yes,' replied Frank, 'if the old German's invention for steering balloons is as good as his invention for keeping the gas in them, it would have made a good fortune for us all. Poor Snap!'

'Never mind Snap, sonny,' said old Wharton, roughly trying to hide his emotion. 'You bet he don't want no fortunes where he's got took to.'

'I suppose it wouldn't do to jump out now,' said Frank after a while, as the balloon swept slowly along, quite close to the ground.

'Not unless you prefer hopping to walking for the rest of your life,' said Wharton. 'You'd be lucky if you only smashed one leg.'

Just at that moment the light of the moon flashed back from a small prairie-lake. Before the buffalo had left the prairie it had been a favourite wallow and drinking-place of theirs. Now it was drying up for want of its old-fashioned visitors, who beat and trampled its mud floor into such a solid substance that it held the water all through the long summer months. Still, there was a very considerable sheet of water left.

'Dick!' cried Towzer, 'if we go over that I'll drop into it; it can't hurt much, and I'm not going up again.'

'Wal, no more am I, if I can help it, and I reckon Frank there doesn't want another ascent all by him.'

self; so, if so be as we go anywheres near that water, let's all drop off at once, sonny.'

This having been agreed upon, Frank and Towzer were hurriedly freed from their cords.

The balloon was so low now that every moment the boys expected to be dashed against the earth, but, as luck would have it, she skimmed along like a great white owl in the moonlight, and hung for a moment over the pool. It was enough. There were three sharp plunges in the cool water, and when Dick and his companions came panting to the surface they had parted for ever from the ship of the skies. Looking up when they had gained the shore, they saw her sailing higher and higher, the moonlight seeming to gather about and rest upon her until she was the centre of a great halo.

'I ain't sure as them Injuns weren't right after all,' muttered Dick; 'dang me if I don't think as it is a sperrit.'

'Dick! let us go back to Snap,' was Frank's first remark after realising that once more they were masters, more or less, of their own actions.

'You're a good lad, Frank,' replied the old man heartily, 'but it won't do. We could do no good; they'd just scalp us, and we could not help Snap now anyway.' Besides, do you think that lad could walk twenty miles?'

'Yes, Dick, yes, I could easily,' cried Towzer, struggling to his feet, but even as he did so he staggered.

The long fast, the peril and physical exertion of the last few days, had utterly worn the boy out, and in spite of his plucky efforts he could hardly stand.

'I know as your heart is strong enough, little 'un,' said Dick, 'but your legs have struck work. Just you lie right here with your brother while I look around for some'at to eat. There's some matches, Frank ; see if you can make up a little fire ;' and, so saying, Wharton left them.

After an absence of nearly an hour, during which Frank had contrived to kindle a fire with grass and twigs and game droppings, and his brother had fallen into a heavy, dreamless sleep, old Wharton returned. Putting his hand into his shirt front he drew out about a dozen roots, like small turnips. These he laid down by the fireside, and after trimming them a little with his knife made a place for them in the hot ashes, and set them therein to cook.

'Them's *pommes blanches*, Frank,' said Dick, 'leastways that's what the Crows call 'em. I reckon they learnt it from the French Canadians. Turnips I call 'em, and mighty good they are. Try one.'

Frank wanted no second invitation—cooked and uncooked was much the same to him ; anything would not come amiss which would fill up the terrible vacuum which he felt inside him.

'Shall I wake the young 'un, Dick ?' he asked.

'No, let him sleep a bit. When these things are cooked a bit we'll wake him. He would make himself ill, bolting these *pommes blanches* raw, if you woke him now.'

'Yes,' assented Frank, 'poor old Towzer ! I expect, if he dined with an ostrich to-day, he would eat his share even of mashed soda-water bottles !'

'His share !' exclaimed Wharton, 'he'd starve that ostrich.'

By-and-by, the *pommes blanches* being cooked, they woke the younger Winthrop, and, if they did not manage to satisfy his appetite, at any rate they finished the roots.

'Aren't there any more, Dick?' he asked.

'Not for supper,' replied the old man firmly.

'Well, then, let's begin breakfast, it is nearly morning,' urged the boy.

'No, no, sonny, we'll all go to sleep now if *you* please, and to-morrow we'll begin to work our way back to Rosebud.' said Wharton, and, suiting the action to the word, he lay down where he was, and slept or pretended to sleep.

When the boys opened their eyes it was broad daylight. Birds and insects hung over the pool, beasts had been down to it to drink in the night and had turned away frightened and disgusted at the human taint in the air. The hum and stir of life was all around them. It was quiet, perhaps, for earth, but how different from that dead, appalling silence through which they had sailed but yesterday! Frank almost wondered that the very sun's rays were not chilled and blighted in passing through so drear a region.

But where was Wharton? He certainly was not in sight. Had the old man gone for more food? if not, what had become of him? At the head of Towzer's bed, if a lair on the rough prairie may be so called, was a turnip cut in two, and on the smooth white surface was scratched with a burnt stick, 'Wait here, I'll be back soon'—that was all. Dick had guessed that the turnip would catch the hungry eye of Towzer as soon

as he awoke, so he had made it his messenger. But it did not tell the boys much.

'It's not much good keeping this letter, is it, Frank?' asked Towzer.

'No,' replied his brother, 'why?'

'Well, you see there is'nt much else for breakfast,' was Towzer's answer, 'let's halve it; do you prefer the page with the writing on, or the other?'

Frank laughed a very half-hearted and hollow laugh, and took the food offered him. He was older, and could not forget, even for the moment, as Towzer did.

'I wonder where Dick has gone to, young 'un,' he said after a minute or two of silence; 'I don't believe, now I come to think of it, that he did go to sleep when he pretended to last night. He didn't snore.'

'Well, then, he wasn't asleep,' asserted Towzer; 'but I can't tell you anything about Dick, for if he was shamming I wasn't.'

At that moment the quiet charm of the morning was roughly broken; a dozen rifle-shots echoed through the woods. Again and again came the sharp crack of the fire-arms and the rattling echoes and reverberations among the timber. Faint and far off, too, but still distinct, they heard the Indians' war-whoop, a sound weird as the wolf's call, and fierce as the Highlanders' slogan when the Camerons and LochIELS drove Leslie's pikes and Leven's troopers into the Garry's deepest pool. Man's hate or wild beasts' rage has found no note in which to express itself, more full of terror to those who hear it than the Blackfoots' war-whoop.

The boys sprang to their feet.

'Dick ! Dick !' cried Frank in an agony of apprehension, 'have they got you too, old friend ?'

'No, no, Frank, they would not take so many shots to kill Dick. Listen, it's a regular fight,' said Towzer practically. 'You bet it's Warwolf and his Blackfeet giving "gip" to those Crows. I wish I was there,' he added.

For half an hour the firing continued and then gradually ceased, one or two scattered shots telling the story of the retreat and the pertinacious and vengeful pursuit.

Towards midday a little band of horsemen emerged from the timber, and came galloping towards the pool, their long hair and the scalp trimmings of their deerskin shirts and trousers streaming behind them as they rode.

'It's all up, I suppose,' muttered Frank, and in his heart he was abusing his ill-luck, which had left him to fight his last fight with no weapons and a lame arm.

Still it was pretty certain that, unless they shot him from a distance, there would be one or two sturdy English blows struck before the two Winthrop boys were bound and helpless.

At that moment, however, there was no need of fighting. A loud shout drew their attention to one of the riders, his head bandaged in a piece of coloured cloth, which streamed behind him like the Indians' head-dresses, and in his hand a tomahawk, which had done enough work that day to make the reputation of

a dozen Blackfoot chiefs. It was Dick Wharton riding the Cradle, and next moment he was alongside the Winthrops, together with Warwolf and half a dozen other long-haired braves.

After exchanging a few hurried sentences Wharton procured a lump of pemmican (dried meat) from Warwolf, and proceeded to feed himself and his young friends, the Blackfeet sitting silent and looking on solemnly the while.

'After I'd got you two to go to sleep,' began Wharton between the mouthfuls of pemmican, 'I got up and crept off to the timber.'

'Oh, then, you did play 'possum,' cried Frank; 'if you don't want to be found out, you shouldn't forget to snore another time, Dick !'

'Wal, you were too sleepy to try to stop me anyway,' continued Dick, 'and I couldn't rest in camp; I wanted to take a look at the Crows' camp and see if I could find poor Snap's body.'

Here a lump of pemmican seemed to go the wrong way and nearly choked him. When he had swallowed the obstruction he continued:

'About five miles from here I came on the Blackfeet—ran right into them; painters couldn't go quieter nor they were going, and they were all round me before I knowed rightly where I was.'

Here Warwolf, who understood English, smiled gravely, and, turning, repeated Dick's last sentence to his comrades, one of whom made a reply which seemed to express the sentiments of the rest.

'What are they grinning at, Dick ?' asked Frank.

'Oh,' replied Dick, 'old Bear's-tooth said as it was

only pale-faces who break twigs on the war-path. Wal, perhaps he's right. For sartin, they broke none to-day, but they broke a good many heads an hour or two later,' and the boys' eyes followed Wharton's to the gory trophies which hung by their long black locks from the girdles of the Blackfoot chiefs.

'Had our brother, the white hunter, been as ready with his scalping-knife as with his tomahawk,' interrupted Warwolf, 'there would have been more scalps at his girdle than at ours.'

It was a handsome speech from an Indian to a white warrior, and old Wharton acknowledged it.

'I don't spekilate much in that kind of fur,' he allowed; 'if I do take a fancy to trimming my shirt or pants, I rayther prefer grizzly to Crow.'

'Then you were at the fight, Dick?' asked Towzer.

'Oh, so you've time to make a remark, have you, young 'un?' said Frank; 'I've been watching you some time, and didn't know which would open widest, your eyes or your mouth.'

'Yes, I was at the fight, you bet,' replied Dick, 'and did what I could with this here handy little instrument; but I'd like to have had my six-shooter. Howsomdever, there ain't many Crows to kill now; we surprised them beautifully;' and the old man almost smacked his lips over the grim memory.

'If my brothers are ready,' said Warwolf when even Towzer had finished eating, 'we will start. As it is, we shall hardly reach the Crows' camp by the Lone Mountain before nightfall.'

'Right you are, Warwolf,' said Dick; 'come on. Here, young 'un, you get up on "the Cradle."

It now appeared that the Indians had two more led horses with them, on which Dick and Frank mounted.

In spite of their previous exertions all were eager to reach the Crows' encampment, a hope of plunder urging on the Blackfeet, whilst the voice of hope, which never dies out in the human breast, kept whispering to the other three that it might just be possible—just possible—that Snap still lived.

CHAPTER XXVI

SNAP'S STORY

It was in the grey of the morning, at that mysterious time when the earth is just beginning to think about awaking—before there is any sunlight in the sky—although the shamefaced whiteness of the stars suggests that a greater light than theirs is coming. All was still misty and undefined, a land of shadowy dreams, and the camp of the Crows was silent as a cemetery at midnight. The tall teepees, or tents of deerskin, looked white and ghastly, and the long fringes of scalp-locks which ran down their seams and fluttered from their poles whispered vaguely horrible things to that little chill wind which always precedes the dawn. By-and-by, if anyone had been listening (and surely the Crows should have had some sentinels about), a bird began to move restlessly among the dry leaves, which he rattled as noisily as if his wee body was as big as an elephant's. With a quick querulous chirp he fluttered away, and from time to time another bird woke, chattered, and followed him. Then it seemed to the pale morning star which was watching the camp, and which no doubt has seen many such sights before, that some of the trees were double, for one stem stood still whilst

another parted from it, flitted for a moment across an open glade, and then disappeared. Presently these moving trees grew plainer, flitting hither and thither, swift and silent-footed Indians, or the ghosts of Indians, their long hair adorned with eagle-plumes and their lithe red bodies nearly naked. Then a heavier and better-dressed figure appeared, and three or four Redskins gathered round it. Bending down and listening, the star heard Wharton (for it was he) whisper to Warwolf:

'No! no: my brother, creep in like catamounts. These Crows are cunning as Satan, and like enough them deserted-looking tents is full of braves waiting to shoot you down as you charge. Scatter and come in on all sides separately, so as not to give 'em a solid lump to fire into.'

'Our brother is a great warrior, wiser than the serpent,' said Warwolf; 'let us take his advice:' and, so saying, he and his comrades disappeared again amongst the pines.

The Crows' camp looked for all the world as if animation had been suddenly suspended in it, as if in the full swing and vigour of life it had been frozen or paralysed. The teepees of beautifully tanned white deerskin, painted with all manner of quaint devices in red ochre and other bright pigments, stood with their flaps thrown back as if the occupants had just entered them. They were fine teepees, as well made and as big as any you will see on the North American continent, standing as much as twenty feet high, and some of them (one, at any rate) big enough to hold thirty men. On little rails of rough-cut boughs

still hung some long strips of deer-meat, drying for winter use, while the hides of the beasts whose flesh this was, were pegged out upon the ground near the tents. On one skin lay a sharp-edged white instrument, the shoulder-blade of a wapiti, as if just dropped by the squaw who had been cleaning the skin with it. Over two fires in the open, hung big cauldrons. The fires were out, and looked grey and cheerless enough, but the coyote, who had been smelling round the camp all night, did not think that they were empty. By-and-by, when he grew bolder, he would drag them down, and, when he had upset them, feast on the meat inside. He had been telling his troubles to the moon all night, and his note was not a cheerful one; but even his coat stood bolt upright with terror, and his tail dropped between his legs, at the hideous yell which suddenly roused him from his lair amongst the rocks.

It was the war-whoop of the Blackfeet, and with it came the ring of a dozen rifles which had been fired at random into the silent tents. But they only roused the echoes. There came no answer, either in little jets of flame, or loud report, or dying groan. All was still. The tents were deserted, or the enemy was strangely patient in reserving his fire.

And now from tent to tent flitted the quick figures, and as tent after tent was entered and found empty the strange silence dissolved and the harsh voices of the warriors shouting to each other gave life and animation to the scene. Here a brave was dragging out a pile of rugs from a deserted tent, there another cut down the scalps from his enemy's tent-pole, or in rare cases laid hands on a rifle or tomahawk which its

owner had not had time to take with him in his flight. In the midst of the camp stood one tent larger than all the rest, whiter than all, and richer in that costly trimming which can only be shorn from dead men's heads. Its sides were painted with demons and good spirits, its flap was closed, and a kind of ensign marked it as the tent of the tribal chief.

With a revolver in his hand which one of the Blackfeet had lent him, Dick Wharton approached this tent. Here, if anywhere, he would meet with resistance.

Kheelounha (the grizzly), greatest of all the Crow chieftains, was as brave a man as ever stepped. Whatever had scared away his comrades, he might well have returned, and be lying there behind the closed entrance of his own lodge, prepared to die as he had lived, steel in hand, and the warm blood of his enemies flowing round him in streams.

Dick Wharton listened with straining ear and caught breath, but no rustle of blankets, no breath, however faint, betrayed the presence of a living being. Well! a sudden dash is safer than a deliberate entry, thought Dick, and with a jerk he flung aside the skin-curtain and darted into the gloomy interior.

Quick as light a sinewy figure was upon him, its iron fingers fixed like claws of steel into his throat, and before his finger could touch the trigger of his beloved six-shooter a dexterous back-heel sent him crashing upon his back. As he fell the revolver flew from his grip, he saw the ugly steel flash above his head, while one hand pinned his throat, gagging and choking the life out of him. For a moment his eyes swam, and then a voice somewhere above, seemed to say, 'Dick.'

The old trapper was partially stunned by his fall, and as the word reached his ear the thought that he was already dead flashed through his mind, and this was Snap's first greeting on that further shore. But the hand on his throat had relaxed, and was shaking him now to rouse him, and, looking up half dazed, Dick Wharton saw, not Snap in the spirit, but the strong, wiry figure of the lad he loved.

'So you ain't Kheelounha, Snap! and I ain't a gone coon yet?' remarked Wharton; 'and my hair is on still. But, sonny, how in thunder did you git here alive?'

'I'll tell you that by-and-by, old man,' laughed Snap, shaking him warmly by the hand, 'but why the deuce didn't you say who you were just now?'

'Wal!' replied Wharton, 'I dessay as I had oughter have sent in my paste-board first to know if you was at home, but you see me and them Blackfeet thought as the hull family had left for the season.'

'Oh, you've got the Blackfeet with you, have you?' said Snap, 'and all this time I've been skulking like a rat in a corner, shaking when I heard their infernal war-whoop, and only wondering if I could kill one or two before they whipped off my own scalp.'

'Wal, my boy,' retorted Dick, 'I guess you'd have made it awkward for some of 'em. It ain't a help to conversation to have them claws of yours round a fellow's windpipe.'

'And now, where are the others, Dick?' said Snap.

'All outside somewhere,' replied Wharton; 'you'll like enough find Towzer seeing what he can find to

eat. He hasn't got over his appetite since we came back to earth.'

I must ask my readers to let me skip the meeting between the three boys. The truth is, it isn't an easy thing to describe. To people who know nothing of Englishmen it would appear a very cold and heartless proceeding. The Redskin, perhaps, understands it better than other Europeans do. When he himself comes back from his very longest travels and meets the wife whom he has not seen for a year he never dreams of rushing into her arms, he doesn't even raise his hat or shake hands, but he just sits down at some distance from the family party and pretends not to know who they are. His relations imitate his manner, and when an hour or so has passed and they have got fairly used to each other's appearance he quietly mixes amongst the tribe without greeting or comment, and life goes on as usual.

A Russian would, of course, have wrapped his arms round Snap's neck, kissed him on both cheeks time after time, would very likely have done a little cry down the back of his neck, and then consoled himself with neat vodka and let off steam in cigarette-smoke. The boys simply said, 'Hulloh, Snap, old fellow!' and gripped his hand as if they wanted to hurt it; were very anxious to get him something to eat or drink or sit down upon, and very much ashamed of the colour which came into their cheeks, and couldn't for the life of them understand why the tops of the bull-pines had such a blurred and misty appearance at this time of day.

When the tents had all been ransacked and sentries and outposts stationed by the careful Blackfeet, deter-

mined not to be surprised in their turn, Dick Wharton re-lit one of the fires and warmed up the savoury mess of deer's-meat which it contained. That unfortunate coyote had missed his opportunity.

When they had somewhat appeased their appetites Frank turned to Snap.

'Now, old chap, if you don't mind, explain all this mystery to us. The last thing we know is that you dropped out of the skies and gave your life for ours. We aren't likely to forget that,' said Frank.

'You bet!' remarked Wharton with an emphasis which made Towzer drop the bone he was picking into the ashes.

'Oh, that's all skittles,' replied Snap disingenuously.

'I expect I must just have slipped off that ring somehow. You know I never was much good on a trapeze or anything of that sort at school.'

No one contradicted him. It wasn't necessary. Even the eloquence of an Irish Queen's Counsel could not induce boys to disbelief their eyes.

'You remember,' he continued, 'what a fog there was when I tumbled out. I had just said, I remember, that I could make out the tops of the teepees through it. Well, so I ought to have done. We were quite close over the top of them, and when I fell, as luck would have it, I came bang down on to the side of one of them, bounced off again like a new ball from the wall of a racquet-court, and lay, I suppose, stunned, for some time on the grass. When I came to I was a little muddled, and what puzzled me more than anything when I began to understand things at all was

that I was free, no thongs on my limbs, and not an Indian in sight. I tried my limbs one after another, in a deadly fright lest I should be unable to lift one of them, but they seemed all right, or at least I could use them. When I got up I felt, of course, an ache in every muscle, but nothing was broken, and, although even now I would rather sit on an air-cushion than on a pine-log, I really hurt myself very little by my fall; of course, if it had not been for the side of that friendly teepee, I should have been jam by this time.'

'Well, but, Snap, what about the Indians?' exclaimed Frank.

'As for them,' said his friend, 'I could not understand at first, and, although it seemed very unreasonable, kept suspecting a trap for some time. Of course, what really happened was this.. When we heard the shouting of the warriors as the balloon bore down upon their camp, it was not a gathering cry which we heard, but the sound of a panic. They saw, not the balloon with their four enemies in it just going to drop into their hands, but they saw, or thought that they saw, the great white spirit of the Lone Mountain, incensed by their insolence in approaching too near to his throne, swooping down through the mists of evening like an eagle-owl upon his prey, and—well, they bolted!'

'That's it, Snap! that's it, sonny! You've read 'em like a book,' ejaculated Wharton. 'Do you remember as I said I couldn't understand them Injuns making such a tarnation row when they saw us a-coming?'

'I do,' replied Snap, 'and you were right.'

'I was, sonny, and I am going to be right this time, too, when I tell you that Bull Pine Park is as good

property now for the firm as if it were fenced and railed in, with a regiment of Nor'-West police picketed in every corner of it. Them Injuns—them confounded Crows—will never put their hoofs inside our reserve again, you bet!' and the old cowboy lay back and laughed long and low as he thought of his enemies and the scare they had had.

'Frank,' he said after a while, 'you couldn't draw a balloon, could you? Just a rough outline, you know—a sort of a bubble with a boat at the bottom?'

'Yes, Dick, how will that do?' replied Frank, scratching out the required figure in the ashes at his feet.

'That's the ticket; leastways, if no one has any objection, that's *the brand* of the firm. What do you say, Snap? It ain't easy to get a new brand nowadays, and that will remind us of how we got our range,' said Dick.

'So be it, Dick,' replied he; 'but we must not forget about these papers,' and, so saying, he drew from the inside of his shirt the papers which had been taken by him from the German aeronaut's box A.

'So you stuck to them all the time, did you, Snap?' asked Towzer; 'do you think there is anything in it?'

'Anything in what,' asked Snap; 'in the papers?'

'No, I mean is it worth while bothering about what the old man asks? Don't you think he was mad?'

'Mad or sane,' was Snap's answer, 'I am going to do what he asks us. It may not be a paying speculation to go over to Europe to carry out his bequest on the chance of what we shall get out of his "few little houses at Potsdam" and our share of the patents,

but it is a plain duty to the man whose death was under Providence, the means of saving all our lives.'

'Snap is right,' assented Wharton, 'it don't do to go back on a pard as is dead.'

And so, on consideration, thought they all, and by the time the Indian camp had been thoroughly ransacked, and the victorious and heavily laden Blackfeet were ready to move, our friends had unanimously resolved to make their way back to Rosebud before the snows caught them and detained them for the winter.

It was a very near race, that race between the snow-king and Wharton's little party; but Wharton won, and until his return was explained met with unlimited chaff for what his companions called his want of 'sand.' However, his story put a new aspect on the matter, and all agreed heartily with the old foreman that if he had married a Blackfoot squaw and paid for the range in 'greenbacks' he would not have been more secure of enjoying quiet possession of Bull Pine Park than he was now.

Nares had left, so that they could get no help from him; but the cowboy is a generous and trustful fellow (it's not very safe to take him in, by the way, unless you are an unusually quick revolver-shot), and amongst the 'boys' at the ranche a purse was soon made up to take one of the lads to Berlin to execute the old professor's wishes.

Then arose a difficulty: who was to go? Clearly Snap ought to have gone, but he would not. Towzer was ready enough to go—he did not see much fun in getting up at dawn to feed frozen-out cattle—but un-

luckily a want of confidence in Master Towzer's capacity was felt, and, as old Dick said :

'No, my lad, you had a lot better stay here. If anyone's hide wants hardening it's yourn. Another six months here will do you no harm.'

'Another six months, Dick!' grumbled the lad, 'why, as far as we can see I am likely to grow up with the country as you call it.'

'No, you aren't, sonny,' replied Dick sadly; 'I'm afeard as that old German's inventions may steer a balloon after all, but they'll spoil three likely cowboys.'

'Not *three* anyway, Dick,' said Snap's voice at his side; 'there is one would rather be a cowboy here than a duke over there.'

Finally it was arranged that Frank should go.

'He is as level-headed as a Yankee lawyer,' said Dick, 'and, besides, his arm isn't all right yet. I'm thinking the frost got into it a bit.'

So Frank went, and the boys saw him off, papers and all, and stood for nearly a quarter of an hour looking along those bright metals which led so straight towards the east, the iron link which binds the old world to the new.

CHAPTER XXVII

CONCLUSION

JUST one more scene, readers, and then you must say good-bye to Snap and Frank, Dick, Towzer, and the author. I don't call you 'gentle' reader, as some fellows might do, because, though I like boys to grow up 'gentlemen,' I am not very fond myself of gentle boys—youngsters who sit in the drawing-room and do knitting and play the piano. I dare say they are good enough in their way, but they will never enjoy a merry bout with the boxing-gloves, or, when they grow older, a breathless scurry after stampeded cattle or a pack like the old Berkshire. And that last sentence brings me home again, of course.

It was a November morning at Fairbury, and the way the thrushes were whistling would have persuaded any but a hunting man that it was balmy April instead of bleak November. Bleak it certainly was not. The air was a little fresh and crisp, to be sure, and a good many of the leaves had fluttered down already, but the covers were still too thick to shoot, and the old cock-pheasants who were crowing lustily in the shrubbery last night knew that as well as old Admiral

Chris, whose fingers had been itching ever since the first of October for a ‘cut at a rocketer.’

‘Uncle Chris always does kill a few “magpies” about the end of September,’ had been Frank’s verdict long ago, and I fear that the allegation was true in fact, for that keen old sportsman, used to shooting in an Indian jungle at everything he saw, from peacocks to a native gun-bearer, could not always resist the attractions of a precocious ‘longtail.’

It was just nine o’clock; morning prayers were over, and the sun glanced off the old red brick and through the tree-boughs into the windows of the breakfast-room of the Hall. There it lit on a snowy cloth, glanced at a tempting pink ham and some cold game on the sideboard, peeped over the top of the plate-warmer before the fire, and discovered kidneys lying lovingly alongside little rolls of bacon (for all the world like the ringlets of the last generation) and many other good things. There was a pleasant aroma of coffee about the room; a glow of firelight within, and a more glorious glow of sunlight without.

Altogether it was a room the very memory of which makes me feel hungry and happy.

In the room, at the moment at which I ask you to peep into it, are four people: a little grey-haired lady in a dark dress, and a quantity of pretty feathery white things about her, as becoming as hoarfrost on an evergreen; and three men. You could not disguise the Admiral if you tried, so I won’t try; but it is hard to believe that it is he indeed, for, instead of looking older, he looks positively juvenile, in spite of the old-fashioned blue stock which he wears.

'Every friend will be there,
And all trouble and care
Will be left far behind—'

he hummed.

'And so will you, Chris, if you don't stop singing and rescue the kidneys from Willie,' interrupts Mrs. Winthrop, with a smile in her bright eyes.

'Oh, don't, mother, that's too bad of you, and you know it's my last chance before that North-west appetite arrives on the scene,' expostulates that young gentleman, arrayed in all the glory of white leathers, although an old shooting-coat still clothes the form which in another hour will blossom into pink.

'It's not like Snap to be so late,' said the Admiral, 'and the morning of the opening meet too !'

'You forget, Chris, that he didn't get here, could not have got here, until three this morning. How would five hours' sleep suit you, my brother ?'

'Well, mother, the Admiral started early,' put in Frank. 'I heard the first gun ten minutes after you left the dining-room last night.'

'Pooh, pooh ! boy,' puffed the indignant veteran, and would probably at that moment have conclusively proved to his disrespectful nephew that no Admiral ever snores ; but just then there came a tap at the French window, and everyone rushed to open it. Another moment both Mrs. Winthrop's hands lay in Snap's, and his tall young figure bent as he kissed the little woman reverently on the forehead.

'God bless you, Snap !' was all she could say, and his answer came quite quietly :

'He has, dear—aren't we all at home again ?'

And then, somehow, all settled quietly into their old places, only that there was a tendency on the part of everyone to follow Snap's every action with friendly eyes, anxious to discover something which they could do for their hero.

As for Snap, he was not such a prig as to think for a moment that this great change, or any of it, was his doing. 'Deuced lucky' was what he *called* it—in his own heart he had a more reverent way of speaking of it.

This November morning was just two years from the day when he and Towzer had stood watching the Eastern train disappear along the line, carrying Frank and the old German's papers with it. In Berlin Frank had found that the professor's name was as well known as the Kaiser's; more, that his name was known as well in London or Paris as in Berlin. Von Bulberg, the professor's friend, had received Frank with open arms, had gathered the scientists of the great city together to fête him and listen to his story, had helped him to find an honest and expert lawyer, and, between them, they had taken out the patents and executed every wish expressed in that last will and testament.

As for the 'few little houses at Potsdam,' the worthy aéronaut evidently set small store by the ordinary things of this earth. When a young man he had come into a very considerable property, of which he had spent very little, and ever since his inventions had been adding one small fortune to another, all of which had been invested in house property at Potsdam. The result was that when Frank's lawyer laid

the accounts before him he found that an income of nearly 10,000*l.* a year would fall to the share of himself and his friends, as representing ‘the few little houses at Potsdam.’

As the professor had no kith or kin, the boys had no scruple in taking the good things Providence had sent them, but I fancy that a very considerable portion of their share of the royalties on the professor’s two patents finds its way to such institutions as Dr. Barnardo’s Home for Boys and the like.

With their portion of the money Frank and Towzer had bought back the old home, investing all they had to spare in Snap’s ranche, for neither persuasion nor anything else could tear him away from Dick and the Bull Pine Range, upon which these two partners had now got together as fine a herd as you will see in the North-west. After much correspondence and two years of waiting his old friends had at last induced him to come home for a winter’s hunting.

Out West, Dick was in command, and under him was as smart a lot of riders as even he could desire. The cattle did well on the Bull Pine Range, being well sheltered among the bluffs round the Lone Mountain, so that during the winter there was no reason why ‘the boss’ should not come over to the old country for a spin with the hounds if he could afford it. And Snap could afford that, and a good deal more. Ten per cent. for your money would be marvellously good interest in any business in England; with luck, Dick and Snap did not think much of twice that at Bull Pine.

‘So, Snap, I see your professor’s patent is to be adopted by the Army,’ remarked the Admiral.

‘Yes, Lord W. has approved it, and what he approves is bound to “go” nowadays,’ replied Snap. ‘I should think they would be very useful for reconnoitring an enemy’s position, for surveying the country generally, and taking messages from point to point.’

‘That’s all very well, but what are the other fellows going to do all the time? wouldn’t they put a bullet into your great gas-bag and bring it down with a run?’ demanded the Admiral.

‘I think not, sir,’ said Frank; ‘we had a hole or two in ours, and she didn’t come down as fast as we wanted her to always.’

‘Besides, you forget, uncle,’ added Towzer, ‘that she would be a little “taller” even than the tallest rocketer, and you know they are too tall even for you sometimes.’

‘Well, you may be right, Snap,’ the Admiral allowed, taking no notice of Towzer’s insinuations, ‘but I’m glad that I shall never be Admiral of a fleet of those crafts.’

‘You agree with Dick, sir,’ said Snap; ‘“give me a cayuse,” he says, “as’ll buck itself out of its girths, as’ll buck itself out of its skin, if you like, but no more of them bally balloons for me!”’

‘Ah, well! here are *our* cayuses, Snap, and it is about time that we got into the saddle. It is a good four miles to the Lawn,’ remarked Frank; while Towzer, always intent on creature comforts, was anxious to know what Snap would have in his flask.

‘No spirits, thank you, old chap,’ was the answer.

'I've brought a large supply of good ones of my own. Neither whisky nor "tip" could compare to the spirits I am in this morning.'

Five minutes later they were in their saddles, the Winthrops in pink, dressed with all that scrupulous neatness which is essential for a soldier or a fox-hunter, and which comes amiss to no one. Snap was more quietly attired, but his was an easy figure for the tailor to fit, and when he rode up with his friends, the connoisseurs of men and of horses, who were chatting and smoking at the meet, decided with one consent that, though there might be a bow where there ought to have been a strap, a button too many or too few, yet, allowing for the fact that he was 'only a colonist,' that young Hales looked a good sort, and '*a workman, sir, all over.*'

A 'workman all over.' It's hunting slang, I know, but it is the keynote of the English character still, thank goodness. If you *can* work and *will* work, and that work is honest and true, men will respect you, women admire you, and even the most exacting of relations forgive you what one may call vice, another mischief, an indulgent old sailor 'go,' or a Nor'-West cowboy, like Dick, 'sand.'



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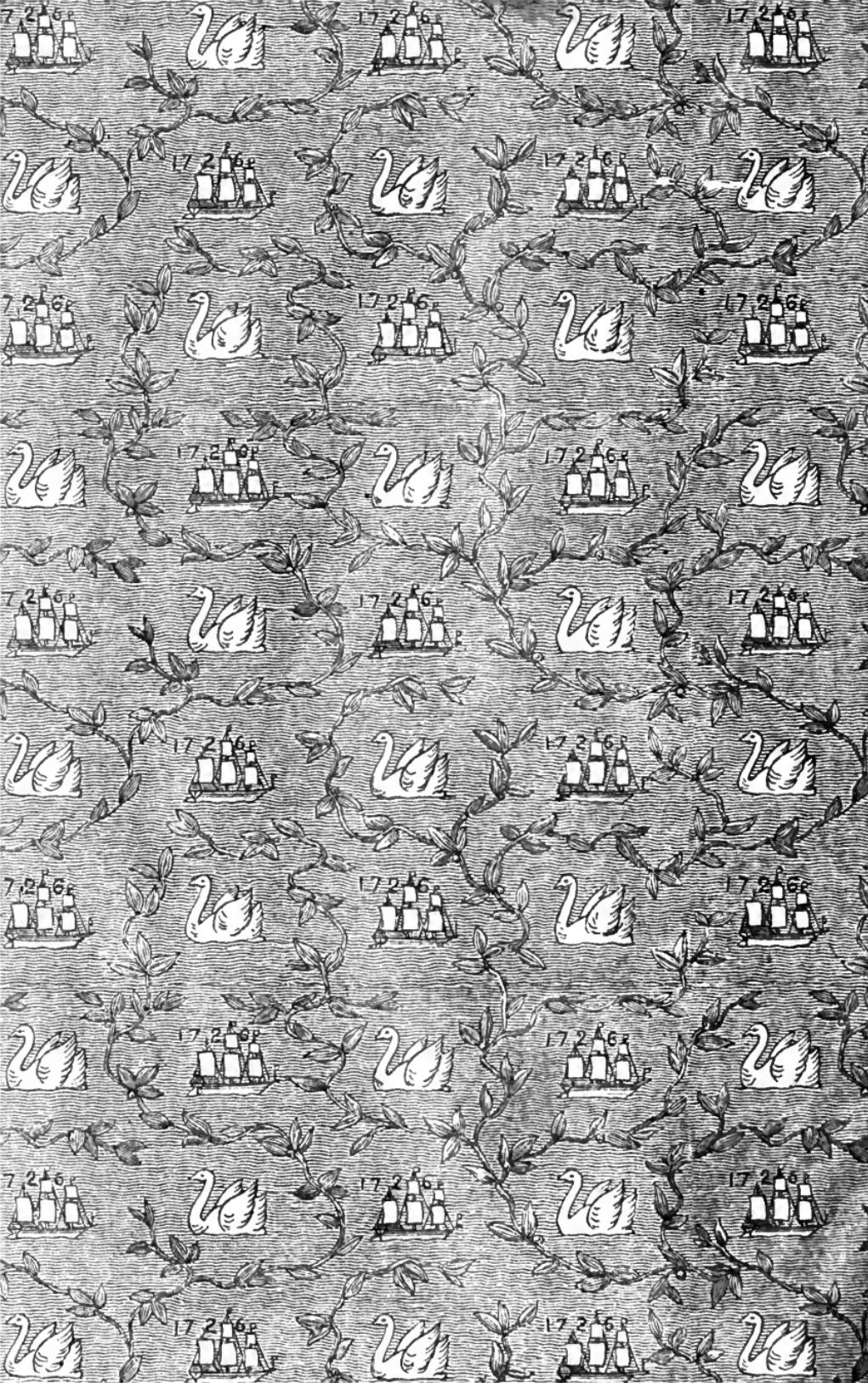
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